

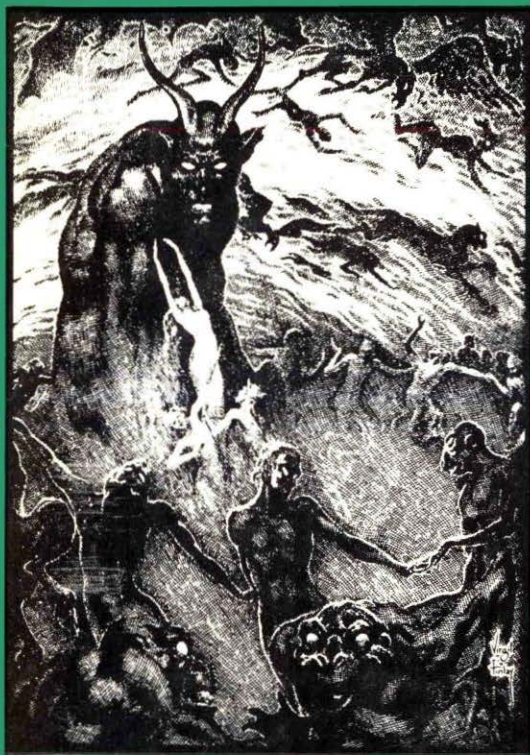
ACME

March No. 26

50c

M A G A Z I N E O F
HORROR

THE BIZARRE, THE FRIGHTENING, THE GRUESOME



Jules de Grandin in
**THE DEVIL'S
BRIDE**

by SEABURY QUINN

**CLIFFS THAT
LAUGHED**

by R. A. LAFFERTY

**THE WHITE
DOG**

by FEODOR SOLOGUB

FLIGHT

by JAMES W. BENNETT
& SOONG KWEN-LING

TALES FROM CORNWALL

A New Series by DAVID H. KELLER, M.D.

The Editor's Page

If you had been reading AMAZING STORIES monthly and quarterly, and WEIRD TALES in 1928, and added SCIENCE WONDER STORIES and AIR WONDER STORIES to your list when they appeared in the newsstands in 1929, then you would have thought you knew what to expect when you picked up the October 1929 issue of WEIRD TALES and saw the title, *The Battle of the Toads*, by David H. Keller on the contents page. And you would have been astonished; for here readers saw a different sort of story, written in a different manner from such powerful tales as *The Revolt of the Pedestrians*, *The Menace*, and *The Human Termites* (still running in SCIENCE WONDER STORIES at that moment). There is a touch of grue, to be sure; but the manner is light, almost whimsical. And the following two issues brought *The Tailed Man of Cornwall* and *No Other Man*, so that there was no doubt that we had a series here.

But only one more "Cornwall" story appeared in WEIRD TALES: *The Bride Well*, in the October 1930 issue; eight years later, *The Thirty And One*, was published in the November 1938 issue of MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES; three years after that, *The Key to Cornwall* appeared in the February 1941 issue of STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES. And that apparently was all we would see.

For some time, readers have been urging me to see if I could obtain

the rights to reprint this series; and Sam Moskowitz and others told me that there were a number of unpublished tales in the series. That turned out to be an understatement: what we have is a full book-length collection of stories, each complete in itself, but running chronologically. The title of the book is *Tales From Cornwall, A History of the Hube-laires*.

These are *tales*, rich in legend and folklore, rather than tightly plotted stories, although some of them certainly have plots in the commercial fiction sense. There is, as I mentioned above, a touch of the gruesome in them, but after a few we find a light, whimsical touch—never the heavy-handed sort of slapstick which burlesques the medium itself. A child can listen to them or read them with the same sort of open-mouthed wonder that a child finds in the famous fairy tales, while an adult can enjoy them and see something more. And I suppose, if you really insist upon doing so, you can apply various elements of various psychopathic theories to them too; in some quarters, this constitutes the acme of literary sophistication. (Of course, where such procedures actually help you to understand yourself and your fellow human beings better, this is all to the good; I do not either decry or demean such exploration with that purpose—but I don't think the activity has anything to do with the sort of enrichment one can receive from enjoying a story simply for what it is on its literary surface.)

Fairy tales have been under assault for some time, but I am

reminded of some comments that the late C.S. Lewis made in relation to them and to their supposed morbid effect upon tiny tots, their alleged damage to the child's capacity for relating to "reality". He notes that he himself enjoyed such stories thoroughly as a child, but never found that they distorted his perceptions or understanding of the "real" world. What he did find damaging was the so-called "proper" stories about "real life and real people" told to children, for these gave positively false pictures of the world in which we actually live, among people as they actually are. In other words, enjoying fairy stories did not result in his encountering any nasty shocks later in life, but believing what adults told him in stories "proper for children" resulted in many nasty shocks when he learned the truth. And looking back on it from my own personal experience, I find that what was upsetting to me about Grimm, etc., was not the stories themselves, but the fearful attitude of adults who were sure that I would be greatly harmed by such stories, and their

anxiety-ridden attempts to assure themselves that I had not been totally led astray; while finding out, as I grew older, that I had been systematically lied to by teachers, both so-called religious and secular, about the world as I actually would encounter it, was traumatic. So much then for the case against fairy tales.

The first story in Dr. Keller's series, *The Oak Tree*, is dated 200 B.C., when Folkes-King Eric rules in Wearfold, Norway, and Olaf is Lord of the House of the Wolves at Jutland. The family name will not be changed to "Hubelaire" until 57 B.C. With each story, we will present a section of the "argument with dates" relating to preceding tales. And we shall find, in this presentation that Dr. Keller prepared before he died, that the six previously published tales did not appear in chronological order. However, I shan't say any more here, for if you have read any of them before, that would infringe upon your pleasure of finding them in the proper place. RAWL



Tales From Cornwall

by David H. Keller, M.D.

(author of *The Abyss, Heredity, etc.*)

1. The Oak Tree

Lord Balder was old and tired, no longer able to lift the hammer with which he had slain a giant in his youth. But a stranger came to see him before the arrival of the marauders in their fifty dragon ships . . .

BALDER, LORD OF THE WOLVES, sat before his house in a massive chair, cunningly carved from the solid bole of a birch tree. Every day, except when winter hurled snow over the town and ice-locked the little harbor, he sat in this chair, sleeping at times and occasionally talking to his sons and the little children. His old face was lined with the passing of many years. His hair, once yellow, was now snow white. His family were proud of that hair, and his great-granddaughters quarreled over the right to comb and brush it.

At night he slept peacefully in a large bed, the posts of which were carved with wolf heads. He rested on and was covered with woolens filled with goose down. For many years he had slept alone, ever since his lovely lady, Thyra, daughter of Folkes-King Eric of Westfold, had left

him after love-nesting in that bed till she had given him seven sons and three daughters.

The family lived in a cluster of stone houses. For many years they had been isolated from the world, self-sufficient and well satisfied with life. The sea furnished them food, the forests meat and wood, the pastures grass for their cattle and grain for their geese. Though they had no near neighbors and none had been in battle since Lord Balder was a young man, they spent part of every day playing at war, perfecting themselves in sword fighting, throwing the spear at a target and hurling the hammer.

Six dragon ships floated in the land-locked harbor. When their Lord or one of his sons died they placed him on a ship with all his war gear and his favorite horse and, setting fire to the ship, watched it sail toward the setting sun and Valhalla. Then they built another ship.

Year after year Balder sat in his great chair, saying less and dreaming more. At times he talked of the past glory of the Wolves. He told of their ancestor Scyld, who had come from the faraway land in the West. He had been only a boy when he sailed to Jutland in a rudderless boat, magically steered by the goddess Gefjon, who later married him. From that time the family had been befriended by the gods. Thor had taught them the use of the hammer in battle. When the Wolves were very young he had sent a falling star into the center of the town. It was flat on one side, sharp-pointed on the other and very heavy. A clever smith had attached a handle of hickory wood to this star, fastening it securely, and bound the wood with bands of copper. Around the handle he had woven strips of bulls' hide so it could not slip out of the hand. Balder's father and grandsire before him had used this hammer in battle and it had never failed. None had used it since Balder had last killed with it, for it was so heavy that his sons could do no more than lift it from the ground. Balder kept the hammer clean and polished and it was always near him by the chair during the daytime and on his bed at night, for he thought the time might come when he would need it; but, as the years passed, his strength failed and finally he could only raise it from the ground and hold it proudly on his broad thighs. While he would not admit it, all the family knew that he would nevermore throw it in battle.

One pleasant day in early spring all the Wolves were merry. The young men and girls gathered wood of nine different kinds and placed it on a nearby mountain top to be burned at night as Balder's *Balar*. A pile of toadstools, called *Baran*, was placed nearby so they could be

thrown into the fire to frighten the trolls who roamed the mountains, awaiting a chance to harm the family. The older men went into the forest on a very special mission, while the women were busy preparing food for the feasting. Only the little children had nothing to do, and so they gathered around Lord Balder and listened as he told of the hammer and how he had fought with it in his youth. He often talked thus, but, as he grew older, fact blended with fancy till even he was not certain how many of the enemy he had actually killed. Nevertheless it was all very wonderful to the little ones, and even the adults paused to listen, for they were proud that such a mighty warrior was their Lord.

"Tell us of Balder, the Beautiful, the god you were named after", demanded a flaxen-haired, blue-eyed girl as she climbed up on the old man's knee. The other children shouted, "Tell us the story! Tell us the story!" and then were silent as the old man started to tell the tale, which was his habit each year on the day the Wolves celebrated the return of their favorite god from Valhalla.

"Balder, son of Odin, was, of all the gods, the wisest and most beautiful. One night he had a dream in which he fancied he was dead. He told this dream to the other gods and they determined to safeguard him from every danger. The goddess Frigg, acting for them, made fire and water, iron and all metals, poisons, sickness and all living plants and animals take an oath that they would never harm Balder."

"Did they keep that oath?" asked a boy.

"They did. The gods tested them. They threw stones at Balder, shot arrows at him, hacked him with swords and even built a fire under him, but nothing they did hurt him in any way. However, Loki, the Evil One, was not pleased and asked Frigg, 'Did you give an oath to everything?' and Frigg replied, 'To all except a little plant called the mistletoe, which grows east of Valhalla. It seemed too little to bother with. Then Loki went to Valhalla and found this plant and returned to the place where the gods were amusing themselves shooting arrows at Balder. Only blind Hother did not shoot. Loki asked him why he also did not shoot and he replied that he could not see. Then Loki placed a bow and arrow in Hother's hands and told him to shoot. Hother shot the arrow tipped with mistletoe and it passed through Balder and he died.'"

"What happened then?" asked one of the girls.

"All the gods wept. The women wailed and tore their hair and cried, 'Weep for Balder the Beautiful, for he is dead.' They carried him down to his dragon ship, the *Ringhorn*, which was beached on the shore, but they could not launch it. Then a giantess named Hyrrockin came riding

a wolf and she pushed the ship so hard that, as it slid into the sea, fire flashed from the rollers and all the earth shook. They built a funeral pyre on the ship, and on it they placed Balder and his wife Nanna, who had died of grief. They killed Balder's horse and placed him near the dead god, after that they set fire to the ship and started it on the voyage to Valhalla."

"But he came back! He came back!" shouted the children.

"Yes, every spring he comes back to bless the crops and bring warmth, peace and happiness to all his people. That is why we burn the *Balar* and make merry, for he has come back and will be with us until the snow lies heavy on the earth. Then he will return to Valhalla. He is a great god, and I am fortunate to be so named as he."

Then Holga, the oldest son, returned with the other men from the dark forest, carrying bunches of mistletoe.

"Did you have success?" asked Balder.

"Yes, Olaf cut the mistletoe off the sacred oak tree with his arrows. As the branches fell we caught them so they would not touch the ground."

"Good!" exclaimed the old man. "Now divide it with the gold knife. Place branches in every house, and the women shall eat the seeds so that there will be babies next year. Now send me the blind harper."

The harper, led by his pupil, came and sat on a pillow at Lord Balder's feet. He was almost as old as the ruler of the Wolves. For many years he had played on the gold harp with three brass strings and sung songs he had learned from his teacher, who, in turn, had been taught them by an older singer of songs. His pupil sat near him, but his harp was of wood, with strings of braided horsehair. On this he accompanied the blind harper, repeating the words of the song in a soft whisper so that, when the time came, he would become the harper of the family and play on the golden harp.

The blind harper asked Lord Balder, "Is there a special song you would have me sing?"

"Yes," Balder replied. "Sing of the very old days when we ruled in the islands beyond the setting sun, and how, when that land sank beneath the angry sea the boy Scyld, son of Othin, sailed to Zealand, married the goddess Gefjon and founded our family. This is the song that always should be sung on this day."

The harper sang that song, which he had learned from his master, who, in turn, had learned it from his. For many generations that song had been sung, each harper adding new and fantastic touches so that the facts were buried under a mound of fancy; but it was a brave song

and resounded with the past glory of the Wolves. While he sang Balder went to sleep.

Holga's oldest daughter turned to her father. "Tell us how your father won his beautiful bride. Grandfather Balder should tell the tale but now he is asleep and you must tell it for him. Many of us know it, almost word for word, but some of the little ones should hear it again, for no feast of Balder the Beautiful is complete without the telling of the tale."

"I will tell it," her father replied, "though it will come second hand and it would have been better had my father stayed awake to tell it; but he is growing old, and more and more he sleeps in his chair with the Thor hammer on his thighs. Now you children cease from your playing and gather around me. Perhaps the older Wolves will forget, for a little while, their age and pretend they are children listening for the first time to a story of our Lord Balder and how he won his bride, the beautiful Thyra, daughter of Folkes-King Eric of Wearfold, who ruled in the land where the nights are half a year long.

"Balder, son of Olaf, Lord of the Wolves, though only twenty years of age, had voyaged to the southlands seeking treasure from the weaklings of faraway kingdoms. He was a man above the common man, born to command and be obeyed. His father knew full well that some day he would go in a burning ship to Valhalla and longed for his son to sail into the northlands, find and marry a princess, fair-haired and blue-eyed, so the House of Wolves would grow and prosper.

"Balder, wishing to please his father, sailed in his dragon ship with twenty of his best warriors. Driven by wind, the ship sailed north, and wind lacking, the warriors rowed, ten on each side; but ever Balder stood at the helm, steering the ship from pounding surf and treacherous rocks. On and on they sailed until they came to a faraway land, shaken with bitter winds, and there they saw a castle half-buried in the drifted snow.

"Leaving the ship they went to the castle and there gained entrance to the banquet hall, where King Eric sat. High rose the flames in the wide fireplace. All around, the armed warriors sat, while wolfhounds slept contented on the rush-strewn floor. The warriors feasted on seal and bear meat washed down with mead, telling tales of war and love and wild adventures of the past. But King Eric and Prince Balder held quiet converse, asking and answering many questions. Then the King sent an old woman to his daughter, requesting her presence that she might help entertain the Prince.

"She was a woman fair, broad at the shoulders, with deep blue eyes and Saxon hair, the braid of which, when she walked, swept the

floor. One look at her and Balder knew that she would make a loving bride, and fast his heart beat as he felt the wonderment of love.

"Then the King told of a giant, a spear's length and more, who ruled the touching lands. He had few warriors and needed none, for all he leapt against he crushed and with the killings added to his riches. He was a mighty priest, favored by the gods, and none could stand against him.

"This cruel giant had sent messengers demanding that the King should send his daughter with a dower of jewels and much gold, and claiming that the gods had willed that they should wed.

"Balder cried in answer, 'This must never be. I and my twenty Wolves will fight this craven giant and thus make safe your kingdom and protect the maid.' The gracious Princess answered for her father. 'Oh, Prince, you seem a good and kindly man. I grieve to have you die. Yet go, you must, you and your great-limbed warriors. Here is my token. Wear it on your helm; it may protect you in the coming battle.'

"He took her token, wound the golden chain around his helm and told her that he would soon return victorious. The next day and the next Balder and all his men toiled through the drifted snow, and at long last they came to the giant's castle near a lake of crystal ice, windswept of snow. Here they put on skates of reindeer bone and skimming over the ice came to the castle door, where stood the giant awaiting them. Balder cried, 'Thou cur, who cannot kill the prey yourself but eat the carrion nobler bears do leave! The time has come when you shall perish. I and twenty of my warriors have come to speed you on your way and thus rid the land of such a noisome pest.'

"The giant skated to them, glorying in his strength and sure of victory. Though oft wounded, he killed seven Wolves. Then Balder, grief-stricken to see his comrades die, went berserk and threw his hammer at the giant. So great the throw, so sure the aim, the hammer broke through breastplate, shattered ribs and tore the giant's back in two.

"They stripped him of his armor, took his weapons and left his broken body on the ice, fit food for the great meat-eating white owls to feed on. Then, carrying their seven dead, they slowly returned to the castle of King Eric; but before they ate they placed their dead on a dragon ship and sent it burning through the floating ice to Valhalla.

"And after this Balder told them of the battle on the frozen lake and all the banquet hall rang with shouts of praise. That winter Balder and his Wolves guested in the castle, but when summer came again and all the land was green with grass and flowers he sailed southward taking

with him his bride, the lovely Thyra. Olaf rejoiced to see his son again and swore that he had seldom seen a lovelier woman. He bought his dead wife's jewels and her crown and gave them to the proud and happy bride.

"When Olaf died Lord Balder ruled, and wrong and crime were banished from this happy land as mist is scattered by the summer sun. And so the House of Wolves lives on and always will, for nothing can destroy our race as long as we hold fast to courage, pride and faith.

"Now that is the tale so often told by my father. I first heard it when I was but a lad. When he told it on the feast day of Balder the Beautiful he always ended thus: 'Perhaps some of you children may not think the giant was as large as I said, but he was taller than his spear, which now stands in the corner of my house. None of the Wolves, with hand held high, could touch the point. Yet, after he died, we laid that spear beside his body and the point came only to his shoulder. So you may see for yourself that he was a mighty man. Yet, with one blow of the Thor hammer, I broke his back in two.' Thus our Lord Balder ended his story and, now as he is asleep, you may go into his house and see the spear. He always keeps the hammer with him and even now it rests upon his thighs, but it has been many years since he had thrown it at a mark and none of his sons can do much more than raise it from the ground."

Then the older children ran off to play, while the little ones went to see the spear. The men began war games with swords and hammers and the women resumed the preparing of the feast.

Balder, rousing from his sleep, found himself alone. Then a little man, dressed in black velvet, came out of the dark forest and sat at the feet of Balder.

"Welcome, stranger," the Lord said. "I judge you have come in peace, for you have neither sword nor armor."

The little man laughed. "I do not need them. It seemed proper that I visit you and share your pleasure in the greatness of your family."

"Yes. Great indeed. My wife bore me seven sons and three daughters and now I have many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. All worthy members of the House of the Wolves."

"You have every right to be proud of them; and so have I, since I was the father of your beloved wife."

"How can that be?" asked the puzzled Balder. "I thought her the daughter of King Eric; at least he told me so."

"You had a right to believe him. I go by many names but in the

southlands where the sun is warm and the grapes hang heavy on the vines I am called Pan. I often play the pipe, and when I do, all the folk, animals and birds make merry. I have that pipe with me, a simple reed one with but eight notes, yet the music is most pleasant. Let me play for you."

As he played on his pipe the little children gathered around him while the goats ran from the forest and the geese, wings flapping, came from the meadow. They all formed a large circle about him, and round and round they ran, laughing and bleating and honking while the little man played. The young women joined hands with their husbands and danced merrily. Finally the stranger stopped playing and the children returned to their games while the goats went back to the forest and the geese to the meadow.

"I was in the northlands years ago," the stranger said, "and there I met a lovely maid tending a flock of geese. For three days I stayed with her, playing for her pleasure, and then I wandered on. I heard that soon after that she married a great king and bore him a daughter who was called Thyra. Naturally the king thought the little one was his, and he had every right to think so, but his wife knew I was the man who had given her the child. This has often happened when I play the pipe for the pleasure of a maid. So all of the family of Wolves are mine as well as yours, and I am here to protect you from a danger that might, unless you act wisely, destroy them."

"That is a very strange tale," mused Balder. "Part of it seems improbable but, after seeing the children, goats and geese dance when you played the pipe, I can understand how the music might influence the soul of a maiden. But Thyra was a lovely bride and true wife any man should be proud of. If you had known her, as I knew her, for many years, you would be proud of such a daughter."

As they sat talking a runner came, breathing heavily, and bowing to Lord Balder, told of fifty dragon ships coming down the coast to Jutland, burning the little towns and spilling blood and dealing death to all who stood against them. Within two days more they would come to the land of the Wolves, and in each ship were twenty-one mighty Norsemen. Balder called his seven sons and told them the news brought by the runner.

"We will stay and fight!" cried one of the younger sons. "Why should the Wolves run from their enemies?"

But the little stranger, though silent, sent advice to Lord Balder and he said to his sons, "We could stay and fight but that would most surely

be the ending of the Wolves, for we are few and they are many." He gave this command to his oldest son, Holga: "Store water and food on our dragon ships and take all of the family—the men, women and children aboard. On the ships place our best stallion and five fine mares and as many goats and geese as you can find room for. Sail as soon as you can and find a new home in the southlands, where I hope you will live at peace with your neighbors. As for me, I cannot, I will not flee, but will wait here till the spinner comes to the end of my life rope and the cutter cuts the strands. Die I must some day, and soon, and it is better to die fighting than in my bed."

"Tonight you will set fire to Balder's *Balar* so he will know that we remember and honor him. In return he may help you in your new life, give large crops and more babies so the House of Wolves will ever prosper. Be sure to take the branches of mistletoe with you to hang in your new homes, for perhaps that magic plant does not grow in the southlands to which you are sailing. I will sleep tonight, but all of you must work loading the ships, for there is no time to waste."

Late the next day the Wolves rowed out of the little land-locked harbor in their six large dragon ships. There were not enough men to sit at the one hundred and twenty oars, so all the women sat with them and the children helped as best they could, two to an oar.

Lord Balder sat in his chair before his house. None of his sons were there to listen to his words of wisdom; no harper played for his pleasure and no little children combed and brushed his hair. To him much of the past was forgotten, while the present seemed like a dream and the future was so hid in a mist of uncertainty that it was useless to worry over it.

Then the stranger came and once again sat on the ground at the feet of Lord Balder, and he asked, "What will you do now?"

"I do not know," Balder replied. "My family are safely sailing to a new home in the southlands. As for me, I am simply waiting to kill and be killed, for I am only one man and cannot prevail against these Norsemen who sail against me in fifty dozen ships. If I were a high rock in the harbor I might wreck the ships flung against me by the waves. If I were a giant oak I could stand in front of my house. The mistletoe would grow on me and the birds would nest in my moss-covered branches. But I am neither a rock nor an oak but only a very old man, so I must die. But when they kill me I will go fighting to Valhalla and, in spite of my age I may be able to take some of these proud Norsemen with me."

"I like the idea of your being a giant oak tree," the little man said

softly. "You have sailed these seas but were never really happy unless your feet touched the earth. I think you would enjoy being an oak. Since that is your desire I will arrange the matter in a way that will be very satisfactory to you but somewhat disconcerting to those warriors who are anticipating the pleasure of killing you."

"I do not worry about dying," answered Balder, "for everyone who lives long enough grows old and finally the old must die like a rotten tree that at last falls to the ground. But I grieve for my Thor hammer. It would be a sorry thing to have it taken by these wild men from the North. For that hammer has been used by the Wolves for many long years. Had I been wise I would have told my oldest son, Holga, to take it with him; but, filled with the pride and foolishness of years, I kept it hoping that I might once again kill with it. I should have known that I have only strength to raise it from the ground and place it upon my thigh."

"If I do all else I will also care for the hammer," the stranger replied, "for I am as proud of it as you. Perhaps Thor sent it falling from the skies, but I helped the old smith when he fastened it to the handle." Then the man played a very simple melody on his pipe and Balder slept.

The next day the dragon ships rowed into the harbor and were beached on the sand while Lord Thordis and all his men waded ashore.

"Where is the town of the Wolves?" Thordis cried. "Only two nights ago we saw a large *Balar* burning on the mountains, so the Wolves must have been here then, yet now, in some way, they are gone. I thought we would find riches here, men to kill and women to pleasure in. Is it possible we landed at the wrong harbor?"

"This should be the place," his son answered, "but there are no houses, no pits of grain, no cattle and no people. Nothing but a barren shore with only one tree, a giant oak, so large it would take long to cut down. But it is a sacred oak and must not be harmed. Somehow the Wolves have escaped us and nothing remains to profit us for the labor of the voyage. We can do nothing but sail on and hope for better fortune in the days to come."

"Now here is a wonderous sight," exclaimed Lord Thordis. "An my eyes do not deceive me, up in that oak, caught between two branches, is the mighty Thor hammer of the Wolves, used by Lord Balder when he was young. I have heard our singer of songs tell of Balder's killing a giant with it. When we sailed here I wanted that hammer more than riches, for they buy little of lasting worth; more than the slaughter of men, for we can do that any day; more than the capture of women, for

one woman is very like all others, and they all age and lose their beauty. So we will cut down the oak and then I will kill with Balder's hammer and, after me, my sons and their sons will kill with it, for Thor sent it from the skies and none can withstand it. That hammer is a weapon like to which there is none other and I must have it."

"Touch not the oak, Father," pleaded his son, "for it is a sacred tree, favored of the gods, and harming it will bring us much woe and little gain."

But Lord Thordis paid no heed and, taking his battle axe, strode to the tree and gave it a cut so deep that he could not pull out the axe. A strong wind made all the branches shiver, and Balder's hammer fell through the air and crashed into Lord Thordis's helmet, scattering his brains on the sand. Seeing their Lord die, all the Norsemen stood very still with fear deep in their hearts, for they knew this killing had been sent by the gods.

While they were still wondering, a storm came from the ocean and a high wave dashed the fifty ships far inland and all the Norsemen were destroyed by the fury of the water. But the giant oak withstood the storm, for its roots were dug deep into the earth and all its branches were sturdy.

Then Pan made a magic so that lightning would never harm the oak nor winter winds tear its branches; and Balder lives on, well content in his new home.

The Reckoning

While no voter expressed dislike of the Ambrose Bierce story, it was the only one in our November issue which never achieved first place, even in a tie. I expected some dislike of Dr. Keller's story, but only one person so voted; there was more dislike for the prose poems. Here are the finals:

(1) *The Eye of Horus*, Steffan B. Aletti; (2) tied between *Once in Thousand Years*, Frances Bragg Middleton, and *Four Prose Poems*, H. P. Lovecraft; (3) *The Abyss* (conclusion), David H. Keller, M.D.; (4) *A Diagnosis of Death*, Ambrose Bierce.

Mr. Aletti has the distinction of having written the first completely new story to win a first place in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*.

Tales From Cornwall

by David H. Keller, M.D.

(author of *The Abyss*, *Heredity*, etc.)

2 The Sword and the Eagle

This is the second of the series of stories DAVID H. KELLER, M.D. wrote around the legends of Cornwall; and while some of this "history of the Hubelaires" is rooted in recognizable myth and legend, much is original with the author. A number of the stories in the series appeared in *WEIRD TALES* and other magazines in the 20s, 30s, and 40s; we see now that there were many more previously unpublished than most of us suspected. And one of Dr. Keller's last projects was to put the Cornwall series in order; so with each chapter, which is a complete tale in itself, we shall run a section of the "Argument from Dates" which will bring the reader up to the time of the current story.

AS HAROLD, LORD OF THE WOLVES IN ARMORICA, strolled among the stone houses which sheltered his family, he watched the children playing merrily while the women worked and the men perfected themselves in the use of the sword, spear and hammer. The Wolves had been at peace for many years but nonetheless were always preparing for a war which they hoped would never come. Mountains surrounded the small valley where the cattle and geese were herded by the older children. Six dragon ships rose and fell with the waves in the little har-

ARGUMENT FROM DATES

200 B. C.	Folkes-King Eric rules in Wearfold, Norway. Olaf is Lord of the House of Wolves in Jutland.
190 B. C.	Balder, son of Olaf, is born.
189 B. C.	Thyra, daughter of Eric, is born.
171 B. C.	Balder adventures to Wearfold, kills a glant and marries Thyra.
140 B. C.	Odin, only son of Holga, is born.
100 B. C.	The Wolves are driven from Jutland by the Norsemen. Balder is transmuted into an oak tree. Under the command of Lord Holga the Wolves sail southwest and find a new home in Armorica.
99 B. C.	Harold, son of Odin, is born.
77 B. C.	Edward, son of Harold, is born.

bor. Some of them were very old and had been used by the Wolves when they fled from Jutland.

Lord Harold was pleased with all he saw; but he was gravely concerned about the peculiar personality of Edward, his only son. Though Edward was a likeable lad, there were moments when his father despaired of his ever becoming worthy of being Lord of the Wolves, for he seemed both unable and unwilling to realize that some day he would rule and, perhaps more important, marry and have a son who in turn would rule after him.

Turning to the forest that stood thick and tall behind the village, Harold found his son seated on a bed of thick club moss, resting against a tree and playing on a harp. For moments Harold stood looking at the young man, who continued playing, seemingly unmindful of his father's presence. Finally, the tune finished, he looked up with a smile. "It is new. How do you like it, Father?" he asked. "When I have perfected it I will teach it to our harper, who will fashion words to go with it; perhaps a song that will remind us of the former greatness of the Wolves."

"It is sweet music," his father replied, "but I have more important matters to talk about. Instead of spending your time playing the harp you should adventure among our neighbors, find a comely maiden and mate with her. Surely there must be one who is worthy of being the bride of the future Lord of the Wolves and the mother of still another Lord to rule when you and I are both dead. Our ancestors, mindful of their responsibility to increase the number of Wolves and provide for an heir who would become ruler, hesitated not to marry the Pictish women when they settled here in Armorica. Your debt to the Wolves is no less than

theirs. You should realize that it is your duty to provide our family with a future Lord."

"You are still a young man, Father, and many years will pass before you journey to Valhalla. I admit the need of there always being a Lord to govern the Wolves, but just now it does not seem to be a matter of immediate importance. Quite some time ago we discussed the advisability of my marriage. I followed your advice, and spent some weeks away from home, entertaining the dark people with my harp and fighting their best warriors, two at a time, disarming them with no blood-letting. That caused much amusement and they marvelled at my ability to use both arms equally well in swordplay. But the maidens liked my music and swordsmanship better than they did me. Besides, I met none who quickened my heart or roused any desire for her. So I returned and continued playing the harp."

Thus ended the argument as always.

The next day a little dark man came to the town of the Wolves and sought a private conference with Lord Harold.

"I bring you news and advice," he said softly. "Some time ago I visited the ancient home of your family in Jutland."

"All I know of that place was told me by my father, Odin," Harold replied. "He was the oldest son of Holga, who was the oldest son of our Lord Balder. My father was only a boy when the family left Jutland but he remembered those last days and often talked of them. He said all the Wolves sorrowed greatly to row away and leave their Lord Balder, sitting before his house with the Thor hammer across his thighs. He must have perished in the blood-letting of the savage Norsemen. What of the home of the Wolves?"

"A few small mounds of moss-grown stones are the only traces of the town. Evidently all the houses were razed and scattered. But where stood the house which, I judge sheltered your Lord there now stands a giant oak. I slept beneath it for one night and the wind-swept branches sent me a very strange dream, for it seemed that the oak tree spoke and told me that it had once been Lord Balder, who was transmuted into a tree when his people fled. And, as his transition was completed, every house fell apart and the stones were scattered as children's drawings in the sands are made smooth and naught remains of their work when the tide flows in. Thus the Norsemen found only the giant oak."

"It may have been a dream," said Harold, "but even so it is comforting to bear that Balder suffered naught at the hands of the raiders. He

commanded us to flee so the Wolves would be saved from destruction. Though we have been happy here and are proud of our little town, we have not greatly increased since leaving Jutland. But tell me more of Lord Balder. If he was changed to an oak his wish to die fighting was unfulfilled."

The dark man put fingertip to fingertip and stared at the ground. "The dream was all confused," he said, "for none lived to tell what actually happened. One can but imagine the wrath of the thwarted Norsemen. There are no branches of the oak, old as it must be, lying on the ground, but near its base a large axe lies embedded. It must have been struck in a very long time ago, for the deep wound is healed and the huge blade nearly overgrown."

"With the help of time and tides the sands have almost completely buried the wrecks of many dragon ships, among which lie a large number of bleached bones. Near one crushed skull I found the Thor hammer, which I recognized at once, for it is the only one of its kind in all the world. So Lord Balder must have had his desire to kill at least one man, though how the others died or all the ships were wrecked in the harbor is a mystery none may solve. I brought the hammer with me, as it is a treasure. It is a weighty weapon which I could hardly lift, but here it is."

He handed it to Lord Harold, who examined it carefully.

"This must indeed be the hammer of Balder, for it is as the singer of songs tells of it. For many years our harpers have sung of this weapon. I will hang it over my fireplace, though I doubt if any Wolf, now or in times to come, will ever be able to use it in battle.

"When we left our old home my grandfather brought a long spear with him. One of our songs relates that it once belonged to a mighty giant killed by Balder when he won his bride. Now we have two weapons to help us remember our wonderful ancestor, the Thor hammer and the spear."

"Now for the real purpose of my visit," the little man continued; "I wish to talk with you about your son Edward. I have questioned many about him since coming to your country and all agree that he is a very unusual man; more interested in playing the harp than toying with a bride."

"That is true and causes me deep concern. In times past our men have taken their women with right hand or left; he uses both hands equally well but says he cannot find a woman to please him."

"So I've heard. Many told me of his swordplay with both hands. I

have decided to help him. Summon him to us and we will determine what he thinks of my present and my advice."

Harold called for his son. "Edward," he said, "this man is very wise and is an old friend of our family. He brings you a present."

As they exchanged greetings the little dark man noted that Edward was not a tall man but broad of shoulders and stood firm and erect like all the Wolves. Unlike his father, who was blonde and blue-eyed, he was black-haired and brown of eye with swart skin, the heritage of his Pictish mother.

Then the little man handed Edward a sword, saying, "This sword was made in Gobi by a clever smith. When the blade was cherry-hot he tempered it by plunging it into dragon's blood. He graved on it a legend which you cannot read, but it says, 'I cut but never break'. The two handles are fashioned from the horns of unicorns. You probably know the old superstition, that if a virgin touches a unicorn she is safe from all men. It was an odd conceit to place such handles on such a blade."

Lord Harold said, "Give me the sword." He held it carefully and felt the cutting edges. "This is the most peculiar sword I ever saw. I admit the double edges are sharp; and it was well tempered by that smith in Gobi, which place I never heard of. Also this is the first time I ever talked to one who know of dragons and unicorns, but this is not strange, for the Wolves are not wanderers. What makes me marvel is that there is a handle at each end. I cannot see how a man could fight with such a weapon. Perhaps my son will be able to solve this mystery," and he passed the sword to his son.

The young man took the sword in both hands. Then, holding it with his right hand, he pulled a long hair from his dark locks and very gently brought it first against one blade and then the other. The cut hairs fell to the ground.

"It is a sharp sword," he said. "I thank the giver, though I am puzzled as to why he gave it to me or how he knew I am adept in use of both hands. In swordplay I could not use a shield, as I must hold the sword with both hands. My enemy would come at me with a down-striking blow while I would simply hold this sword high in the air over my head. His sword would strike my weapon and be cut in two. At least it would if the words graved on it are true. He would then be at my mercy. That is the only way I know to use such an unusual sword in either play or combat."

"Your son has the right idea," the little man remarked to Lord Harold. "Now for the advice. He should journey directly east. At the beginning of

the fifth day of his wandering he will find that which will both please and interest him. He will take with him no other weapon save the sword, no armor, and only sufficient food for the five days of going and the five days of returning."

"Who rules the Wolves, Edward?" asked Harold.

"You are their Lord, Sire."

"And when I command what do they do?"

"They obey."

"Then this is my command. Tomorrow leave home and in every way follow the advice of this rare friend. I trust you will return safely, for if evil befalls you then the ruling line of our family is broken, for you have neither wife nor son to carry on."

Edward took the sword and, bowing low, left the two men.

"Nothing will happen to him," said the little dark man. "I have always cared for the Wolves. In a manner of speaking they are my kinfolk, for Lord Balder married one of my daughters."

"How can that be?" asked the puzzled Lord. "He has been dead—or, as you said, changed to an oak tree—for many, many years."

"You may be right. Perhaps I only think so. Often I make statements because I think them true without being able to explain why. But I am confident your son will have a most unusual adventure and return safely. When he comes back, no matter what he says or does, think kindly of him, for everything a Wolf does is directed by the gods and they are wise. 'Tis best to obey them no matter where it leads. Perhaps I am a god. Who knows?" and he vanished, leaving Lord Harold more confused than ever.

For four days Edward traveled eastward and not once did he meet a man. On the morning of the fifth day he came to a meadow, the grass grown lush, surrounded by tall pines. Here sat a man in a golden chair, on the arm of which perched an eagle who, seeing Edward, flapped her wings and cried, "Hubelair! Hubelair!" or at least so it sounded to the young man. She tried to fly toward him but was prevented by a long gold chain which bound her to the chair.

The seated man looked keenly at Edward. Though he remained silent it seemed that he asked a question, which the young Wolf understood and answered.

"For four days I have walked through the dark forest, not knowing why or what I sought. But now I know. Give me the eagle!"

The man laughed. "You have the impudence and impetuosity of

youth. For years I have sat in this chair brooding, while this bird has sat beside me saying only one word in an unknown tongue which I cannot understand, and thus it makes no sense whatever, but only interferes with my brooding. If you can excel me in sword-play you may have the eagle, but if I win the combat I will tie you to the other arm of the chair and, with you on one side and the eagle on the other, I will continue my brooding."

"Fair enough," cried Edward, "and now to the sword!"

Rising from his chair the man drew his long sword from its leather sheath and advanced threateningly upon Edward, who simply raised his sword in air, arm high. The man gave a mighty cut downward and, as his sword met the blade forged in Gobi, it was cut through as though it were a piece of rotten wood; but so mighty was the blow that the severed tip plunged downward and buried itself in the soft sod.

"Now this is magic against which no man prevail!" cried the man. "I can fight against man, but no against the gods. I will unloose the chain and give you the bird; but keep her bound, for, once released, she will fly away and then neither of us will have her."

"No. Take the chain off her leg. I will not keep her a prisoner. Unless she stays with me willingly she stays not at all."

The released eagle flew to Edward at once. Perching on his shoulder she flapped her wings and cried, "Hubelaire! Hubelaire!" or at least so it sounded to the young man.

"Now go you back to the place of your coming," cried the man as he sat down in his chair, "and leave me to my brooding, which I can now do without being constantly disturbed by the raucous cries of this eagle. I have so many important things to brood over that I cannot offer you hospitality. Even if I live to old age I will not have time to sufficiently worry over all the problems which confront me."

"Life is short and a man is young only once," Edward answered. "Unless you had frequent interruptions from unusual visitors, you must have spent many precious years trying to solve your problems. You are either a wise man or a fool."

"Twenty years ago," the man replied, "I climbed a mighty crag and took this eagle, then only a fledgling, from her nest. From that day I have seldom left this chair and during that time you have been my only visitor. Were I wise, I would find an answer to all my questionings; if a fool, I would not spend a second trying to change human destiny. Being neither, I find there is naught else to do but continue my meditations."

For four days Edward walked toward the setting sun and on the fifth came to his home. During this time the eagle often flew into the blue sky until she was but a mere speck, but always she returned to her perch on his shoulder.

"I am glad you have returned from this adventure," Lord Harold greeted his son. "Tell me what befell you and how you come by that fierce eagle which sits so haughtily on your shoulder."

As Edward related all the happenings his father marveled greatly.

"What will you do with the bird? And why did you bring an eagle instead of a woman?" he asked, dissatisfaction in his voice.

"I will keep the window of my house always open so she may come and go as she will; for no one, certainly not a mere man, may tell so proud a bird what she may or may not do. I did not bring a woman because I saw none and, as I told you, only the one man from whom I took the eagle after the swordplay."

Then Edward took the sword and bound the blade with leather and soft velvet and swung it by the two hafts from the lower posts of his bed. There the eagle perched and preened her feathers, what time she was not flying in the blue sky hunting food. And all the young maidens wondered what manner of man Edward was to keep a bird in his bedchamber rather than a woman.

One day the eagle brought in small branches of pine, twigs of spruce and tender ends of the yew and built a nest in one corner of the room, wherein she laid a very large egg. On this she sat for many days, never leaving it, during which time Edward fed her with joints of chicken and rabbit. Then one day she left her nest and flew to her sword-perch crying proudly, "Hubelaire! Hubelaire!" Edward peered into the nest and saw the broken shell and, to his astonishment, a sturdy baby boy.

"Now what to do?" he asked himself. "This proud eagle laid an egg and hatched a boy child. There is no doubt that this is a most unusual event in her life and mine; but instead of wondering how it happened, 'twould serve better to think of the child, for it needs to be fed and cared for."

The eagle flew down from the perch and, standing on the floor, changed into a woman of marvelous beauty with bronze-colored hair and a long robe of deep blue.

"You need not worry about that, my so sweet Edward," she said, "for this is our child and I will care for him as any mother would," and she opened her gown and bared her breast, and the little one suckled and fell asleep.

Full of dazed wonderment Edward sped to his father's house. "Some time ago," he said, trying to control his excitement, "you urged me to adventure into faraway lands and find me a wife who would bear a man-child to be future Lord to the Wolves. Come with me to my house and see for yourself how well I have followed your advice. For, were I tell you now, you would not believe me."

Without replying, Lord Harold rose and went with him. There, in Edward's house, he saw the lovely woman holding the sleeping baby in her arms.

"This is my wife, Father, and the baby she holds so proudly is a boy; though I know little of such younglings, it seems strong and hearty and no doubt will grow to be a mighty man."

All this puzzled Lord Harold. "I don't know how you did it, my dear boy," he said. "How could you keep a woman all this while without anyone's knowing it? And where is the eagle?"

The woman smiled as she looked at the grandfather, father and son and then she replied for Edward. "The eagle has flown away and will never more return, but I can repeat her cry of 'Hubelaire! Hubelaire!' and that shall be the name of all who descend from this boy; no longer Wolves, but Hubelaires. As soon as may be I will clean away the nest and Edward will unwrap the sword and hang it over the fireplace, for we will have use for neither perch nor nest in the future. Bird, or woman, I am proud and clean and wish to live in a house that is neat and orderly. And my son shall be called Cecil."

Some months later the little dark stranger appeared unannounced in the main room of Lord Harold's house.

"How fares it, my dear sib?" he asked.

"So you have come again," Harold replied. "Hapstance you know what happened when my son took your advice? He returned with an eagle, a very unusual bird who kept repeating a single word. In some way, months later, he found a wife and a son. I believe he was as surprised as all the family. Did you, in some way, work a powerful magic to give me a grandchild?"

"That may be. I will not say 'Yea' and I cannot say 'Nay'. But I have come for far more serious business than explaining how an eagle could lay an egg, hatch out a baby, and then suddenly become a very lovely woman. Your family must leave Armorica, which has served as a safe and pleasant home for so many years, and find a new lodgement in the lands across the sea."

"Why must that be? We have no enemies to make war upon us."

"Far to the east there is a mighty city called Rome," the little man explained. "The rulers are never satisfied but are always foraying into far lands to kill, conquer, and hold all folk in slavery. At present their army, under a Lord called Caesar, is advancing through Gaul. They cut a path through the dark forests and build roads. When they come to a river they bridge it with logs and cross dry-shod. Their soldiers are gathered in companies called legions and, so far, even the mightiest of the Gauls have been unable to withstand them. Some day they will reach your land, kill the men, make slaves of the women, and rear the young boys to become soldiers in their legions. That must not happen to the Wolves. You have some dragon ships; build more at once and take all your folk, cattle, geese and grain with you. The wind and tides will carry you to a land called Cornwall, where you will find a place of refuge."

"These are sorry words and perhaps poor advice," growled Lord Harold.

"You have a right to your opinion hut the Wolves—or Hubelaires, as Edward's wife wants them called in the future—must never die. No matter what happens they must live on and on, for to me it seems impossible that anything as fine as the family I helped create should pass into nothingness. So, while time remains, prepare to flee. It would be brave to fight and die, but far wiser to flee and live."

For several days Lord Harold weighed the advice and discussed it with the older men of the Wolves. Finally he gave the order to build more boats. Now everyone was busy and all the women and even the little children did what they could to prepare for the sailing. At last they left Armorica and sailed for many days, wind-driven, till they reached the coast of a new land, where they beached their boats and set free the cattle so they could eat; all made merry, because the new land seemed a place of certain refuge.

The day after landing, Lord Harold, his son Edward and a few of the older Wolves explored the country, desiring to find a proper place to build a new town. In a few hours they came to a very large house, the like of which they had never seen; walls fifty feet high with no opening save a small gate connecting with a drawbridge that spanned a channel of water surrounding the high walls. On one side a watchtower rose high above the lofty wall.

The little dark man stood on the drawbridge awaiting them.

"Welcome to your new home, Lord Harold," he cried, "and greetings

to you, my good Edward. How goes it with your eagle wife and fine boy? How do you like your new home?"

"I never saw anything like it," Lord Harold replied. "How is it built and what use can be made of it?"

"It is a castle. In years to come it will be called the Castle of the Hubelaires, if Edward's wife has her way, and I am certain she will, because she is a very clever woman. In it are many rooms, enough to house all the family at one time. The banquet hall is large enough that all may sit at one long table and eat. Inside is a spring of never-failing water, storage bins for grain and hay, stalls for horses and cattle. Once your family, stock and belongings are in this castle and the drawbridge raised, naught can harm you. Before this you lived in little houses, pleasant enough but impossible to defend. New times, increasing dangers, need different solutions. So I brought you to Cornwall, where I knew this castle waited, for I want your family, Wolves or Hubelaires, to live on and on."

One of the warriors, who was a stonemason, inspected the walls. Turning he said to Lord Harold: "It would have taken hundreds of men many years to build those high walls, my Lord, yet the cutting on the stones seems fresh and the mortar between them is still soft in places."

Harold turned to ask the dark man about it, but he was nowhere to be seen.



Tales From Cornwall

by David H. Keller, M.D.

(author of *The Abyss*, *Heredity*, etc.)

No. 3 Raymond The Golden

This is the third of the Cornwall series, which Dr. Keller arranged into a single book, to be read in chronological order. And, of course, even when a "history" is such charming—and sometimes horrifying—fantasy, protocol requires that we pretend it really happened; thus, as a good historian, the author provides us with an "argument from dates" indicating the high spots of what has gone before, both in the earlier stories and in the "times between"; for this is the old-fashioned, story-book sort of history where each and every detail of each and every year is not gone into exhaustively, but the best "stories" are told.

ANTHON, LORD OF THE HUBELAIRES, asked his grandson, Raymond the Golden, to go with him to the shore of the Hungry Sea. As they sat on the sands he said, "You are my only grandson, Raymond. When I die you will be ruler. I wish you could inherit wealth, prosperity and fame, but we are a little people and there is nothing I can leave you save pride.

ARGUMENT FROM DATES

- 200 B. C. Folkes-King Eric rules in Wearfold, Norway. Olaf is Lord of the House of Wolves in Jutland.
- 190 B. C. Balder, son of Olaf, is born.
- 189 B. C. Thyra, daughter of Eric, is born.
- 171 B. C. Balder adventures to Wearfold, kills a giant and marries Thyra.
- 140 B. C. Odin, only son of Holga, is born.
- 100 B. C. The Wolves are driven from Jutland by the Norsemen. Balder is transmuted into an oak tree. Under the command of Lord Holga the Wolves sail southwest and find a new home in Armorica.
- 99 B. C. Harold, son of Odin, is born.
- 77 B. C. Edward, son of Harold, is born.
- 58 B. C. Edward adventures to the east and marries an eagle. She lays an egg, hatches a boy, changes to a woman and calls her son Cecil.
- 57 B. C. Caesar invades Gaul. The Wolves flee to Cornwall. Lord Harold dies and his son Edward becomes Lord. The family name is changed to Hubelaire.
- 43 A. D. Claudius conquers most of England and builds the Hadrian Wall.
- 350 A. D. The Romans are driven from England.
- 400 A. D. The Hubelaires are never conquered, but repeated sieges of their castle, destruction of their lands, and frequent pestilences so weaken them that they leave Cornwall and sail to the Isle of Lundy in the Hungry Sea. Here they build a walled town and live at peace for thirty years.
- 430 A. D. The Rathlings invade Lundy and attack the Hubelaires. After long fighting with heavy losses on both sides, peace is declared; but the Rathlings remain in Lundy.

"But there is somewhat I must tell you. Before we came to the Isle of Lundy we lived across the Hungry Sea in a land called Cornwall. There we held a mighty building called a castle, the like of which you have never seen. The Cambrians frequently tried to take it but never succeeded; however, frequent wars and disease so weakened us that we were forced to leave it. Before so doing, our Lord hid some of our treasures in a lower room and walled the door shut so none might find it. Because he had the vain hope that some day our people would return and once again become great in Cornwall, he drew a map showing where those treasures were. This chart has passed in succession from Lord to Lord. Now I give it to you. Cherish it greatly. Your oldest son must have it and know its meaning. In turn he must tell his son

and thus the secret will always be known to the Lord of the Hubelaires." He handed Raymond a small parchment.

"They must be great treasures," mused Raymond.

"Not what you think," his grandsire replied. "Neither gold, silver nor precious jewels. The tale, as handed down from father to son, is that long since our folk lived in a far land called Jutland and their Lord was a mighty man named Balder. He had a weapon called the Thor hammer, with which he killed a giant and thus won his bride. When he returned home he brought the giant's spear as trophy. Later we lived in Armorica and our Lord Edward owned a most unusual sword with a haft at either end. The story of his use of this sword is so magical that I can scarce believe it. For many generations these three weapons, the Thor hammer, the spear and the sword were venerated, and finally they were hidden as I have told you."

"We are at peace," Raymond said. "The weather is pleasant and the Hungry Sea at rest. I could sail there and bring these wonderful weapons back to Lundy. It would not take long."

"No. The time has not yet come. We will soon rejoice in the spring-time sacrifice. I hope you will marry then for I cannot die in peace till I know you have a son. The Hubelaires must live on and on, for something as fine as our family must never perish. Since your father died in battle against the Rathlings you have been my only hope. Have you decided which of our maidens you wish to mate with? There are only three old enough, but any one of them would make you a lovely bride. Before this our young men always married outside the family, and that was good; but now that cannot be done."

"Perhaps none of them would want me, Grandfather."

"Why not? Your long golden hair shines in the sunlight. You are dean of limb and strong. You can play on the harp and sing sweetly. None of our men can excel you in the use of the battle-axe or long sword. Yet, withal, you have a tender way in caring for our lambs, and the wild deer come at the sound of your voice."

"All that may be true," Raymond replied with a laugh, "but methinks a woman wants more than all of this. And just what a woman needs to satisfy her I cannot say."

Thus he spoke, because he did not want to tell his grandfather a longing in his heart which he had kept secret from even his kindly mother, Matje.

At the west of the island was a place called Mistland, and what was

there or why, or who lived there, none knew; for in the curling white vapors none could find his way, but, walking cirdewise, ever came out as he came in and was none the wiser. Follwar, the fisherman, had told Raymond tales of the Mist, and how, from his boat on the waves of the Hungry Sea, he had seen the high peaks and heard the wailing of the sea gulls and the white foam of the surf caressing the rocks. The fisherman had added that it was a good place to stay away from, if you wanted to return safely at nightfall. Also Raymond had heard Lord Anthon and the other oldlings tell tales of wanderers lost in the white air, and, finally, arriving at the place of their outsetting.

A year before, Raymond, filled with a desire to succeed where all had failed, had left his home one morning. Cheese and bread were in his wallet, his sword was lashed to his belt, and his three-stringed harp was tied to his back. He walked along the beach till he came to Skullery Mountain, where the sands changed to sharp rocks. Around him was the white, seething mist that hid all before it and covered the skin with the cold, wet hand of the Deathlings.

Now, always before this those attempting to enter Mistland had gone through the low pastures, fearing the surf and the sharp rocks and holding Skullery Mountain to be impassable. But now the Golden One, with the salt ocean at his back and the gulls flying friendly around him, climbed like a goat till he reached the topmost crag, and then, pausing, looked down. From this point of vantage he saw what had never before been seen by any Hubelaire. After that he came often but told no one what he had seen. However, his hair became more golden and his songs sweeter.

Then came late spring: the first strawberries had blossomed and fruited and all prepared for the yearly sacrifice. The Hubelaires wended their way in gay procession to offer the gods the best of their fruit, honey, wine and grain. Lord Anthon preceded the family while Raymond, with flowers in his hair, led those who played on the harp and flute. The little children ran with chains of daisies. Doves fluttered in the air, tied with one foot to the babes who were carried in their mother's arms. Right glad were all hearts for the coming of another year and the mercy shown them by the great gods who ruled them from the sky. All were in festive garb, their arms and war harness being left in their homes.

With trembling hand the aged Lord laid fire to the sacrifices on the altar. Then the three and thirty souls of the House of Hubelaire sang the songs which had been sung by their ancients at the *Balar* of Balder in Jutland, the land that was far away and long ago. And, of those

who played on the harps, none made sweeter or more mirthful music than Raymond the Golden, while, high in the sky, a lark trilled.

Lord Anthon made the sacrificial prayer and all knelt, each asking for that he most desired, with pure hearts and fast-shut eyes. As thus they prayed, the Rathlings rushed upon them from all sides.

The lark ceased singing in the sky; the sun darkened behind thickening clouds of ominous gray; the wind blew biting cold from off the Hungry Sea. Three of the Hubelaires men lay dead on the dark earth, while all living Hubelaires, bound with ropes and earth-stained, lay in a pile.

Sardain, King of the Rathlings, laughed loudly and, as he laughed, threw filth on the sacred altar and horse dung in the faces of the three dead men. All that day the Hubelaires died, and as each one died, the living, bound and helpless, lay watching. For their soul-letting was not clean and peaceful, but was accomplished by all the tortures the barbarians could devise and determine in their twisted souls. So all the men and women younglings and even the babies at the breast were soul-letted till finally only one of the thirty and three, who had gone so happily to the yearly sacrifice, was alive.

Then the bonds of Raymond were loosed and he was led face-to-face before Sardain. The King's hands and all his hairy body were red with blood and to the right and left and under his feet were a multitude of pieces of what had once been the House of the Hubelaires.

"The battle is over, Raymond!" he shouted, while the blood-streaked spittle dripped from his mouth.

The Golden One laughed defiantly. "No! It has just begun!"

"How say you so? Thus far I have spared you. A whim of mine. I wanted you to see the others suffer. Was it not clever how I used the wild horses? Did you ever see anything as comical as the way the hot sword had its will with your virgins? One of my men is a clever worker with colors. He will put the story down on parchment—picturing how each of you died. I will have the paintings bound in a book. You will join the others; the last page is reserved for you. I have a few fine plans for you. But first I will grant you one request. Ask me your desire—but beware that you ask not too much—it must not come between me and my pleasure."

Raymond the Golden looked at him, and his heart grew cold, but not from fear. He prayed to the Gods he wot of, but not for mercy, and then he spake.

"Allow me to be gone from here till the third day; then I will return here or to your house on the other side of the island. Then you may do with me as you will, if only you leave me go till the third day."

"Good!" replied Sardain. "Whatever happens will be good. We have all the boats and it is too far for you to swim to Cornwall. If you come back it will be well, and if you think you can hide on Lundy it will be rare sport for my young men and deerhounds to hunt for you. All the hours you are away I will perfect my plans for my greatest pleasure. We will wait for you here where we have a fire and plenty of fresh meat. We have not had such fine meat for many a year. Let him go! In three days we will see him. I wish I could tell which of those pieces of carrion belonged to the bitch who dropped him. I would save some of her for him to eat on his return."

The circle opened. Raymond bounded away like a frightened rabbit; but he was not afraid.

It was dusk when he reached the base of Skillery Mountain, and so he bathed in the ocean and then lay on the wet sand till the full moon rose out of the Hungry Sea. Because he treaded familiar paths and haste impelled him, he climbed the crags till he reached the topmost and then dropped down on the other side into the dark forest of Mistland. Running along a well-worn path he came to the end of his journey. There in a green meadow, bathed in moonlight and free of the mist that elsewhere hung heavily, stood a round tower, and about it, cud-chewing, lay some cattle.

There Raymond stood and sang a song of his own making, and never had he sung the song save under this tower. Thus he sang:

"Golden sunshine all around,
Flowers springing from the ground,
Love does everywhere abound,
Since the day my Love was found.
Haste then, Love, and to me fly,
Hasten, hasten, or I die."

Then from the tower came a damsel and she ran to him and pressed him to her while two great wolfhounds fawned on him and licked his hands and a broad-shouldered servant came with a torch in one hand and a mace in the other. All together entered the tower.

"I have a thousand questions to ask you," she said.

"For the love you bear me," he replied, "give me bread and wine and a little cheese and let me sleep by the fire on the bear skin, for I am very tired and my spirit is cold within me. When I wake on the morrow I will tell you all."

These things she did, and, while he rested, murmuring in his broken sleep, she and the carl and the great hounds watched over him and over on the hearth the fire was kept brightly burning.

Morning came at last and with it the sunbeams breaking like lances through the rolling mists, and the damsel brought ale and warmed it and a piece of savory fish. When Raymond awoke she nourished him. Then they went hand-in-hand to the ocean and there bathed while the wolfhounds sported between them in the waves. So they came back and sat them on a great mound of moss in the sun at the foot of the stone tower. There, quietly and calmly, for he was very much of a man, he told her all the happenings of the feast day, and how he came to be with her. Because she was high-born, she heard his tale in silence, though there was a twisting of her hands, and, as he spoke, she grew older and her skin ivory for all the body-blood drawing towards her heart.

After he had finished with the speaking, they sat very quiet, and the dogs lay at their feet, their noses between their paws and their eyes sorrowful, for they were fine-bred and could comprehend much of the emotions of their loved ones.

Finally the damsel spoke; "So this is the end?"

"An you look on life as I do and cherish me as I do you, it will be but the beginning of the House of the Hubelaires, instead of a sad and final ending," he replied, "for nothing as fine as our House can die and come to an ending. The Golden Sun which we worship has been swallowed by the Hungry Sea and seems to be dead, but always, on the next morn, it comes alive once more. So it will be with us. I cannot believe that for evermore the Rathlings shall live without punishment for the dark work of yesterday, and there must be another closing of the story."

Then the blood left her heart and all her face turned rosy. "Years ago," she answered him, "my father's ship was wrecked on these rocks and only Walling, our house carl, some dogs and a little childling came alive to the shore. Here we lived in Mistland till you came and found me. Since then I have but lived till the time of your next coming. With you away, Mistland was dark and cold. Because I know you, I know you will wend your way back to your soul-going and leave me alone; and I am not sure I can live without you, but whatever you plan will

be also of my wanting. Only spare me some hours so I can brew for you a simple that I know of, and, ere you come to your ending, drink it for my sake; for well I know that it will ease the pain and help you the better to meet the soul-letting that is being prepared for you."

This Raymond the Golden promised and she went into the tower, but Walling and the last of the Hubelaires walked down to the beach, and, at the end of the talking, the house carl made a sacred promise and swore to it by all the gods he wot of. The old man and the young drew blood from their arms and mixed it, and at that time no one but the two of them knew of the sayings on the sand.

After supper, Raymond the Golden took the damsel by the hand and they walked on the beach listening to the waves murmuring to the sands till the moon was full and they looked upon the golden ball with longing. At last they returned to the thick moss at the base of the tower and there, in the moonlight, they sat down. "Sing to me!" the woman said.

Then Raymond the Golden sang!

"Now little white clouds, on pine trees tall,
Threw shimmering shadows over the wall,
Where the spiders silent held their sway,
Spinning their webs of silvery gray.
There on the grass lay a maiden fair,
With cheeks of cream and raven hair.
So lightly she rested on the grass,
That it hardly bent at its lovely task.
Around her flew the moths so white,
To shade her eyes from the moonbeams bright.
Over her body a soft sheet spread,
Made of down from a dandelion bed.
Out from the flowers a perfume rare,
Was brought by the wind with loving care,
And scattered over her body slight,
To pleasure her as she slept that night,
While mockingbirds, from the thicket near,
Sang songs of love for her sleeping ear."

He paused.

"And what then?" whispered the damsel.

"The rest cannot be sung," replied Raymond the Golden.

So they lay with each other, silent.

Later in the night, she woke, sobbing, and she whispered,

"Sing to me, beloved, for my comforting."

And he sang a song that, thus far, he had never sung to anyone:

"Roses blush when they compare,
Their beauty with my lady fair.
At her feet, the birds of spring,
Silent keep, to hear her sing.
If I were sod, to lie beneath,
The fairy footfalls of her feet,
My happiness would be complete.

Then, in the garden, place my body dead,
So, when she picks the roses red,
Upon my loving heart she soft will tread—
She soft will tread.

And I, within my chambered walls so moist,
Will tremble and so happily rejoice,
To hear again the music of her voice,
The music of her lovely voice."

moss, telling Walling the house carl, to watch against her wakening. He told Walling of the greatness of the Hubelaires and how the family must not die. He gave him the parchment showing where the treasures were hid in the castle in Cornwall and said that it must be given to his son and that the carl must never let the lad forget that he was a Hubelaire. Then, with the flask of simples in his wallet, he went his way but he left his heart and life with the damsel.

Thus the Rathlings had to deal only with the body of Raymond and, though Sardain did his uttermost, it was all too soon done with and the barbarian was greatly discontented. He commanded his artist to make a picture of the soul-letting of Raymond the Golden and put on the last page of the book, to show that this man was the last of the Hubelaires. After that the Rathlings left the altar and the remaining meat around it to the wolves and from that time on they lived in the houses of the Hubelaires.

Now when the damsel had spent the full number of days, she went to her couch and there was delivered of a boy child with flaxen hair. Walling, who minded and tended her, washed the child and brought him to her to suckle.

"It is a man child and will do what is required of him," he said, and the damsel was pleased at the strong tug of the babe and said, "I will call him Raymond and he shall be a true Hubelaire and when the hour comes he shall do the thing for which he was made."

The child slept.

But soon the damsel cried in anguish and when Walling reached her, he found another child, born of her travail, and this baby was small and twisted and very dark. Walling took the child to bathe it and was minded to kill it, but the mother read his mind, "This only also came from the seed of my dead husband, so I will nurse him too and they will grow up company for each other; and I will call him Doom."

Summers passed and fifteen winters howled over Mistland. One night after the lads were asleep, the white-haired woman called the house carl to the fireplace.

"Walling, you have been more than a carl to me, and would that I could pay you, but the tale of your service is not yet told. The time draws near when we must have the Book, and well I know that in the getting of it you may lose your life and leave all the finishing of the task to me; yet, get the Book we must. It will soon be time for the Spring Festival; mayhaps the Rathlings will be drunken with wine in memory of that day, and you can get the Book without harm. But, oh, be sure to return, for I would not know how to struggle on without thy help." And the woman laid a tender hand on the old man's head.

Then Sardain, King of the Rathlings, commanded that the Book be brought before him, and he and all his followers made merry over what the artist had painted on the pages. They drank till they slept, and last of all the King slept, after vomiting on the last page, whereon was pictured the soul-letting of Raymond the Golden.

When he woke, the Book was gone; and fear fell on him because of the going of the Book. After that none dared speak to him of it, and always he walked with his eyes glancing backward over his shoulder. Yet, in bravado, he drank his slumber drink from a certain skull he had cleansed that fateful day and tried to satisfy himself that it all had really happened and that there was no cause for fear.

From then on Walling, the house carl, worked daily with the golden

youth, teaching him all he knew of the use of the sword and shield and mace; how to thrust and guard. Month by month the lad grew and finally he could toy with the carl and do with him as he would. The little twisted lad would clap his hands at the sights he saw when the two men fought. He loved his wonderful brother with a great love.

At night the white-haired woman sat by the fire while the carl and the twinlings lay on skins at her feet. Then she told them of their father and explained that they were the last of the House of the Hubelaires. She told of the bravery and gentleness of the House and how their father had loved her ere he died. When the moon was full she sang them the songs that Raymond had sung, though always with a sob in her throat. Finally she told them of the last days and opened the Book and made young Raymond place his hand with hers on the last page and swear that he would purge the land of the blot on it and revenge his people; but she would never let the little, twisted dark lad swear.

"No, Doom," she would answer to his pleadings. "This is not a task for you. You are to stay here and guard me, and look after the cattle and be my man."

Then, Doom would hug and kiss her, while Raymond went out to walk in the moonlight with Walling and the hounds till his heart beat more slowly and the blood-desire left him; for full well he realized the thing that must be done and eager he was to do it, knowing he would never rest till it was done.

Thus the twinlings came to their manhood, but Doom remained small, like a little child. That winter Walling, the house carl, came to his ending and Raymond laid him in a dry cave, setting at his feet a jug of wine. Within a few weeks the woman said to her giant son, "The time that your father and I dreamed of years ago has come."

"I cannot leave you in your sickness and age," he demurred.

Doom heard them talking. That night, after she slept, he crept to her couch, kissed her hand gently, and went out into the night. All that night he walked slowly, guided by the light of the moon; when morning came he paused on the heather to eat bread and cheese. There he was joined by a little dark man. "My little lad, what is your name and what brings you out on these mountains all alone?" he asked.

"I am not a little lad," replied Doom, "for I am now of age and therefore a man. My name is Doom, son of Raymond the Golden of the House of Hubelaires, and I am going to avenge the murder of my father and his people, who were so foully put to death by the Rathlings before I was born."

"How can you do that? There are so many of them and you are but one."

"That is true, yet I am the only one to do it. There are but three of us, my mother, and my brother Raymond, and me. Brother had to stay with Mother, for she is not strong and needs his care, so I left them. Though I am only one, somehow I will find a way to accomplish that which must be done."

"Since you are so determined," the little man replied, "I will help you. There are other ways of fighting than with the sword or battle axe." Then very slowly he explained how Doom, though small, could accomplish that which he desired. After saying his say, he vanished.

Raymond was puzzled by the absence of his brother but nourished his failing mother, tended the fire and cared for the cattle. She now spent all her days before the fire, never speaking of the desire that was uppermost in her heart. In a few weeks she slept away and her son placed her by the side of Walling. At her feet he placed some golden curls that she, cherishing, had cared for during many weary years. Then he loosed the cattle, put his harness on, with sword in belt, and started on the path to do that which needed to be done.

Biding time, as the moon was not yet full, he stopped at the place where the Hubelaires had died and, gathering the bones, piled them before the altar and covered them with rocks. All that day he went foodless, praying to the only gods he wot of. Then by night, calm and certain of the ending of this adventure, he went to the great house and hid on the thatched roof, parting the rushes so he could overlook the hall and the banquet table, and here he stayed.

Once again, at the Spring Festival, the Rathlings were gathered in the great hall, and counting all, from Sardain the King down to the newest suckling, there were few over two hundred souls; and there were no more, for lacking other enemies they had fought now and then, these twenty-two years, among themselves. This week they were at peace and all gathered for three days of feasting and drinking. Carefully through the years they had saved three firkins of wine, grown old in the cellars of the house.

After much drinking the first night many of the men and all the women and younglings were drunk, so Raymond bithis thumb and waited. Early on the second night Sardain commanded that the three old firkins be brought from the wine vault and that all should drink from them. He said that it was the wine of their enemies, and he boasted that he had

combined with it the blood of Raymond the Golden, who, dying, had been bled like a pig. Hubelair wine savored by rich red blood of the last of their enemies! And once again he commanded that all should drink and that wine should be poured into the mouths of even the smallest ones. This was done as he had ordered, and soon most of the Rathlings fell asleep.

Then the yellow-haired giant on the roof knew that his hour had come. Sliding to the ground he entered the Great Hall, and none stopped him or gave him pause. He walked to the throne of King Sardain. The King looked from him to the skull from which he had just drunk, and so great a fear overcame him that he died.

Inside the hall all was quiet, while outside a wolfhound whined and ran from that place with terror at his haunches.

Then, from the shadows, came a little twisted shape and slipping quietly toward the golden-haired man, fell at his feet with arms around his legs and cried. Raymond picked up the little one and held him close as a mother would her babe. "Oh, Doom, where have you been and what have you done?" he asked.

"Oh, Raymond, my twinling, I feared for you," the little one spoke between sobs. "And one against so many was not right. He was my father, Raymond, as well as yours. If anything happened to me I could be spared better than you, and you had to stay and care for Mother. So I came here, to do that which had to be done."

Raymond but held him tighter, as he crooned over him. "Oh, Doom, my little, gentle brother! How could you be so brave and how came you all the way, over the mountain and through the Mist? What did you do? For it seems to me they are all dead. Even the babies have fallen to the floor. Oh, Mother! I did not know it would be like this when I swore! What did you do, Doom? What did you do?"

The little one made no answer but pleaded to be carried from that place of death. Raymond took up his father's skull and wrapped it in the gown that the damsel had worn that night a golden lad had sung to her, and placed it carefully in his wallet. Carrying the little one in one arm and his naked sword in his right hand he walked around the great hall, but there was no need of the sword, for Death had breathed on all the Rathlings.

Raymond carried the sleeping Doom into the pure air and went his way back to Mistland. After resting and caring for the cattle, he took the gown and what was wrapped in it and laid it at the feet of his sleeping mother.

Then he built a currach in which he determined to sail across the Hungry Sea to Cornwall and recover the treasures of his family, long hid in the Castle of the Hubelaires. He had the parchment showing where it was secreted, and remembered well all that Walling had told him concerning these weapons used by the great Hubelaires in past years. But when he and Doom eased the currach from the shore, a strong wind blew from the north and after some days they landed on the coast of Armorica. Then Raymond knew that the gods had decreed that this adventure was not for him but that some other Hubelaire would, in the years to come, sail to Cornwall and recover the treasure.

In Armorica Raymond became great and married the daughter of a Prince and established a little principality in the dark forest; and this land he called Walling, in memory of the house carl. Babies were born to Raymond and his lovely wife and they were cared for and loved by little, twisted Doom.

Raymond locked the Book in a wooden chest.

Many years passed. Then one night Lord Raymond, beset by memories and compulsion, took the Book from out the chest. Never once had he opened it since his mother had closed it, but now he could no longer withhold the story from his grandchildren.

So he told them all the tale and showed them the pictures, page by page, till he came to the page with the dried vomit splashed over the painting of the death of Raymond the Golden.

Something was more newly drawn in one corner of that page. An oddish mushroom; and written beneath it were these words:

"These, dried and powdered, I mixed with the wine in the three firkins which held our father's blood. Thus, I, Doom, fulfilled my name, and brought an ending to the wicked enemies of the House of the Hubelaires."



Tales From Cornwall

by David H. Keller, M. D.

(author of *The Abyss*, *Hereditry*, etc.)

No. 4 The Thirty And One

Four of the Cornwall Tales appeared in *WEIRD TALES* in 1929 and 1930, and the readers regretfully decided that this was all there would be of them. I myself did not get to read any of these four until 1939, when I first managed to borrow a good-size collection of old issues of WT, prior to the dates of my own familiarity with the magazine, which began with the October 1931 issue (although I had managed to get some back issues, as far as January 1931). So it was with both surprise and pleasure that we all saw this story in the second issue of *MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES* in 1938. One more would make its initial appearance in a magazine a few years later, but I'll save comment on that one when we come to it. The next story in the book will be the one that appeared first in *WEIRD TALES: The Battle of the Toads*.

CECIL, OVERLORD OF WALLING IN ARMORICA, mused by the fire. The blind Singer of Songs, sang the sagas of ancient times, waited long for praise and then, disquiet, left the banquet hall guided by his dog. The Juggler merrily tossed his golden balls into the air till they seemed like a glistening cascade, but still the Overlord mused, unseeing. The wise Homunculus crouched at his feet uttering words of

ARGUMENT FROM DATES

- 200 B. C. Folke-King Eric rules in Wearfold, Norway. Olaf is Lord of the House of Wolves in Jutland.
- 190 B. C. Balder, son of Olaf, is born.
- 189 B. C. Thyra, daughter of Eric, is born.
- 171 B. C. Balder adventures to Wearfold, kills a giant and marries Thyra.
- 140 B. C. Odin, only son of Holga, is born.
- 100 B. C. The Wolves are driven from Jutland by the Norsemen. Balder is transmuted into an oak tree. Under the command of Lord Holga the Wolves sail southwest and find a new home in Armorica.
- 99 B. C. Harold, son of Odin, is born.
- 77 B. C. Edward, son of Harold, is born.
- 58 B. C. Edward adventures to the east and marries an eagle. She lays an egg, hatches a boy, changes to a woman and calls her son Cecil.
- 57 B. C. Caesar invades Gaul. The Wolves flee to Cornwall. Lord Harold dies and his son Edward becomes Lord. The family name is changed to Hubelairs.
- 43 A.D. Claudius conquers most of England and builds the Hadrian Wall.
- 350 A.D. The Romans are driven from England.
- 400 A.D. The Hubelairs are never conquered, but repeated sieges of their castle, destruction of their lands, and frequent pestilences so weaken them that they leave Cornwall and sail to the Isle of Lundy in the Hungry Sea. Here they build a walled town and live at peace for thirty years.
- 430 A.D. The Rathlings invade Lundy and attack the Hubelairs. After long fighting with heavy losses on both sides, peace is declared; but the Rathlings remain in Lundy.
- 440 A.D. The Rathlings break the peace and kill all the Hubelairs; but Raymond the Golden, before his death, becomes the father of two sons, Raymond and Doom.
- 462 A.D. Raymond and Doom destroy the Rathlings and then sail to Armorica, where they establish the little kingdom of Walling.

wisdom and telling tales of Gobi and the buried city of Angkor. But nothing could rouse Cecil from his meditations.

At last he struck the silver bell with a hammer of gold. A serving man answered his call.

"Send me Lady Angelica and Prince Gustro," he commanded and then, once again, sat silent with chin in hand, waiting.

Soon the two came to his summons. The Lady Angelica was his only child, as fair and wise as any lady in all Walling. Prince Gustro some day would be her husband and help her rule the Hubelairs. Meanwhile he had perfected himself in the use of the broadsword, the lute, hunting

with the falcon, and the study of books. He was six feet tall and twenty years old and had in him the makings of a man.

The three sat around the fire, two waiting to hear the one talk, the one waiting till he knew just how to say what had to be said. At last Cecil spoke.

"No doubt you know what is on my mind. For years I have tried to give happiness, peace, and prosperity to the Hubelaires in our land of Walling. We were well situated in a valley surrounded by lofty forests and around them high mountains. Only one pass connected us with the great, cruel, and almost unknown world. In springtime, summer, and fall we sent our caravans of mules laden with grain, olives, and wine out into that world and from it we brought salt, weapons, and bales of woolen and silken goods for our needs. No one tried to molest us, for we had nothing they coveted. Perhaps years of safety made us soft, sleepy, and unprepared for danger."

"But danger has come. We should have realized there were things in that outer world we knew not and therefore could not even dream of. This spring our caravan, winding over the mountains, found, at the boundaries of the dark forest, a castle blocking their way. Their mules were not birds and could not fly over; they were not moles and could not burrow under. And the lads with the mules were not warriors and could not break their way through. So they came back, unmolested, 'tis true, but with their goods unbartered and unsold."

"I do not think that castle was built by magic. I have looked at it and it seems nothing but stone and mortar. And it is not held by an army of warriors, for all we hear is that one man occupies it. But what a man! Half again as tall as our finest lads and skilled in the use of weapons. I tried him out. One at a time I sent to him John of the flying axe, and Herman who had no equal with the two-handed sword, and Rubin who could split a willow wand at two hundred paces with his steel-tipped arrow. These three men lie, worm food, in the ravine below the castle. Meantime our country is strangled so far as trade is concerned. We have cattle in the meadow, wood in the forest, and grain in the bins; but we have no salt, no clothes to cover us in the winter, no finery for our women, or weapons for our warriors. We will never have these while this giant in his castle blocks our caravans."

"We can capture the castle and kill the Giant!" cried Prince Gistro with the impetuosity of youth.

"How?" asked the Overlord. "Did I tell you that the path is narrow? You know that. On one side the mountains tower as lofty as the eagle's

flight and as smooth as a woman's skin. On the other side is the Valley of the Daemons and no one has ever fallen into it and come back alive. The only path that leads through the castle is scarcely wide enough for one man or a man-led mule. If I could send an army 'twould be different; but only one man at a time can enter and there is no man able to combat this Giant successfully."

Lady Angelica smiled as she whispered. "We may conquer him through chicanery. For example: I have seen this hall filled with warriors and fair ladies almost put into endless sleep by gazing at the golden balls flying through the air and back into the clever hands of the juggler. And the blind Singer of Songs can make anyone forget all except the music of his lays. Do not forget our Homunculus is very wise."

Cecil shook his head. "Not thus will the question be answered. This mad Giant wants only one thing, and that means, in the lastward, everything so far as as our land and people are concerned. Perhaps you have guessed. I will tell you his demand ere you ask the question. Our Lady's hand in marriage, and this, when I die, to rule Walling and the Hube laires."

Lady Angelica looked at Prince Gustro. He saw her shake her head ever so slightly.

"Better to eat our grain and olives and drink our wine," he said. "Better that our men wear bearskins and our women cover themselves with the hides of deer. 'Twould be best to have them wear shoes of wood than pantofles of unicorn skin brought from Araby. It were a sweeter fate for them to perfume their bodies with crushed violets and mayflowers from the forest than to be scented with perfumes from the trees of the Spice Island in the East. This price is too heavy. Let us live like our fathers and our fathers' fathers, even climb trees like the monkey folk, rather than have such a ruler. Besides, I love the Lady Angelica."

The Lady smiled her thanks. "I am still thinking of the use of intelligence overcoming brawn. Have we no wisdom in Walling, besides the fair, faint dreams of a weak woman?"

"I will send for the Homunculus," her father replied. "He may know the answer to that question."

The little man came in. A man not born of woman, but grown for seven years in a glass bottle, during all of which time he read books held before him by wise men and was nourished with drops of wine and tiny balls of asphodel paste. He listened to the problem gravely, though at times he seemed asleep. At last he uttered one word: "Synthesis."

The Overlord picked him up and placed him on one knee.

"Have pity on us, Wise Man. We are only simple folk and know but little. What is the meaning of this strange word?"

"I know not," was the peculiar answer. "'Tis a word that comes to me out of the past. It has a sweet sound and surely must refer to something mystical. I recall now! It was when I was in the glass bottle that a wise man came and held before my eyes an illuminated parchment on which was written in letters of gold this word and its meaning! 'Synthesis. All things are one and one thing is all'."

"Which makes it all the harder for us to understand," signed the Overlord.

Lady Angelica rose from her seat and came where her father sat. She sank on the bearskin at his feet and took the little hand of the dwarf in hers.

"Tell me, my dear Homunculus, what wise man 'twas who thus showed you this word and its meaning on the illuminated parchment?"

"He was a very wise ancient who lives alone in a large cave, by a babbling brook. Yearly those living near him take bread, meat, and wine, leaving them at the mouth of the cave, but none dares enter it and thus for years he has never been seen. Perhaps he is still alive and takes the food, but if he lies sightless and thoughtless on his stone bed then the birds and little beasts eat the food, thinking it should not be wasted."

"I have heard of this hermit," exclaimed Cecil, "and when I was a boy went to the woods where the cave is but dared not enter. We will find out whether he is alive or dead. Gistro, order horses so we four can visit him. Three horses for us and an ambling pad for our little friend so naught of harm will befall him."

The four came to the cave and entered it. A light burned at the far end and there was the wise man, very old, with naught but his eyes telling of the intelligence that never ages. On the table before him in a tangled confusion were glasses, earthenware, crucibles, one each of astro-labe and alembic, and an hourglass through which ran silver sands. This was arranged with cunning machinery so that every day it tilted around and once more allowed the sands to tell of the passing of the twenty and four hours. There were books covered with mildewed leather, locked with iron padlocks and spider webs. Hung from the ceiling was a representation of the sun with all the planets revolving eternally around that fair orb, but the pitted moon alternated with light and shadow.

The wise man read from a book written in a long dead language, and, now and then, he ate a crust of bread or sipped wine from a ram's horn, but never did he stop reading. When Cecil touched him on the shoulder to attract his attention he simply murmured, "By the Seven Sacred Caterpillars! Let me finish this page, for what a pity were I to die without knowing what this man wrote some thousands of years ago in Angkor."

At last he finished the page and sat blinking at them with his wise eyes sunk deep into a mummy face while his body shook with the decrepitude of age.

"What is the meaning of the word, 'synthesis'?" Lord Cecil asked him.

"'Tis a dream of mine which only now I find the waking meaning of."

"Tell the dream," the Overlord commanded.

"'Tis but a dream. Suppose there were thirty wise men, learned in all wisdom obtained from reading of ancient books on alchemy, magic, histories, and philosophy. These men know of animals and of jewels such as margarites and chrysoberyl; of all plants such as dittany, which cures wounds, and madragora, which compelleth sleep. Why should anyone want to sleep when there is so much to read and profit by the reading? But these men are old and some day will die. I would take these thirty old men and one young man and have them drink a wine I learned to distill years ago. Then by synthesis there would be only one body—that of the young man—but in his brain would be all the subtle and ancient wisdom of the thirty savants. Thus we could do, century after century, so no wisdom would be lost to the world."

Lady Angelica leaned over his shoulder. "Have you kept this wine you made?" she asked.

"Yes, and now I am working on its opposite, for why place thirty bodies into one unless you know the art of then separating that body back into the original thirty? But it is hard. For any fool can pour the wine from thirty bottles into one jar, but only a wise man can separate the wines and restore them to their original bottles."

"Have you tried this wine of synthetic magic?" asked Cecil.

"Yes, I took a crow and a canary bird and had them drink of it and now in yonder wicker cage a yellow crow sits and nightly fills cave with song as though it came from the lutes and citherns of faerie-land."

"Now that is my thought," cried the Lady Angelica. "We will take the best and bravest of our warriors and the Singer of Songs' pupil and

the Juggler of Golden Balls and the Sleep-maker, thirty men in all, and they and I will drink of this synthetic wine and thus the thirty will pass into my body. Then I will go and visit the Giant in his castle and there in the banquet hall I will drink of the other wine and there will be thirty to fight against the enemy of our people. They will overcome and slay him. Then I will drink again of the synthetic wine and in my body carry the thirty conquerors back to Walling. Once there, I will again drink of the second potion and the thirty men will leave my body, liberated by the magical wine. Some may be dead and others wounded but I will be safe and the Giant killed. Have you enough of it? Enough of both kinds?"

The old man looked troubled. "I have a flagon of the synthetic wine. Divided it would make sixty-two doses. Of the other, which changes the synthesized back into their original bodies, only enough for one large dose and a very few drops more."

"Try those drops on the yellow bird," Cecil commanded.

The old man poured from a golden bottle, graven with a worm that eternally renewed his youth by swallowing his tail, a few drops of a colorless liquid and offered it to the bird in the wicker cage. The bird drank greedily and of a sudden there were two birds, a black crow and a yellow canary and, ere the canary could pipe a song, the crow pounced on it and killed it.

"It worked!" croaked the old man. "It worked!"

"Can you make more of the second elixir?" asked Prince Gustro.

"What I do once I can do twice," proudly declared the ancient.

"Then start at once and make more. While you are doing it we will take the golden bottle and the flagon and see what can be done to save the Hubelaires, though this is an adventure that I think little of, for 'tis fraught with much danger for my daughter." Thus spake the Overlord.

With the elixirs in a safe place they rode away from the old man's cave. But Prince Gustro took the Overlord aside and said, "I ask a favor. Allow me to be one of those thirty men."

Cecil shook his head. "No. And once again and forever, no! In the doing of this I stand to lose the apple of my eye. If she comes not back to me I may die of grief, and then you, and you alone, will be left to care for the House of the Hubelaires. If a man has but two arrows and shoots one into the air, then he were wise to keep the other in his quiver against the day of need."

The Lady Angelica laughed as she suspected the reason of their whis-

pering. "I will come back," she said gaily, "for the old man is very wise and did you not see the yellow bird divide into two and the crow kill the canary?"

But the Homunculus, held in Lord Cecil's arms, started to cry.

"What wouldst thou?" asked the kindly Overlord.

"I would be back in my bottle again," sobbed the little one; and he cried until he went to sleep, soothed by the rocking canter of the war horse.

Two evenings later a concourse of brave men met in the banquet hall. There were great silent men, skilled in the use of mace, byrnies and baldricks, who could slay with the sword, spear, and double-bitted battle-axe. The Juggler was there, the Singer of Songs, and the young Reader of Books, who was very wise. And with these was a man with sparkling eyes who could, by his glance, put men to sleep and then waken them with a snap of thumb and finger. And to this company was added the Overlord, Prince Gustro and the trembling Homunculus. On her throne sat the Lady Angelica, beautiful and very happy because of the great adventure she had a part in. In her hand was a golden goblet and each of the thirty men held a crystal glass. These thirty and one drinking vessels were filled with the wine of synthesis. Then the flagon, half empty, and the small golden bottle containing the colorless wine were hid by the Lady Angelica beneath her shimmering robe. Outside a ladies' horse, decked with diamond-studded harness, neighed uneasy in the moonlight.

Lord Cecil explained the adventure while all the thirty men sat very still and solemn, for they had never heard the like before. None feared a simple death, but this dissolution was something that made even the bravest wonder what the end would be. But when the time came and the command was given they one and all drained their crystal glasses, and even as the Lady drank her wine they drank with her to the last drop.

Then came a silence broken only by the shrill cry of a hoot owl, complaining to the moon, concerning the doings of the night folks in the dark forest. The little Homunculus hid his face in the shoulder of the Overlord, but Cecil and Prince Gustro looked ahead of them over the banquet table to see what was to be seen.

The thirty men seemed to shiver and then grew smaller in a mist that covered them; finally only empty places were left at the banquet table. None were left but the two men, the Lady Angelica and the shivering Homunculus. The lady laughed.

"It worked," she cried. "I look the same but feel different, for in me are the potential bodies of the thirty brave men who will overcome the Giant and bring peace and security to our land. And now I give you the kiss of hail and farewell and will adventure forth on my waiting horse." Kissing her father on the cheek, her lover on the mouth and the little one on the top of his curly-haired head she ran bravely out of the room. Through the stillness they could hear her horse's hooves, silver-shod, pounding on the stones of the courtyard.

"I am afraid," shivered the little one. "Because I have all wisdom I am afraid as to this adventure and its ending."

The Overlord tried to comfort him. "You are afraid because you are so very wise. Prince Gustro and I would like to fear, but we are too foolish to do so. Can I do anything to comfort you, little friend of mine?"

"I wish I were back in my bottle," sobbed the Homunculus, "but that cannot be, because the bottle was broken when I was taken from it, for the mouth of it was very narrow, and a bottle once broken cannot be made whole again." So all that night Cecil rocked him to sleep, singing to him lullabies while Gustro sat wakeful before the fire, biting his fingernails and wondering what the ending would be.

Late that night Lady Angelica arrived at the gate of the Giant's castle and blew her wreathed horn. The Giant dropped the iron-studded drawbridge and peered curiously at the lady on the horse.

"I am the Lady Angelica," she said, "and I have come to be your bride if only you will free passage to our caravans so we can commerce with the great world outside. Then, when my father dies, you will be the Overlord of Walling, and perchance I will come to love you, for you are a fine figure of a man and I have heard much of you."

The Giant towered over the head of her horse. Placing a hand around her waist he plucked her from the steed, carried her to his banquet hall and sat down at one end of the table. Laughing in a rather silly manner, he walked around the room lighting pine torches and tall candles till the whole room was illumined. He poured a large glass of wine for the Lady and a much larger glass himself. Seated at the other end of the table he cried: "It is all as I dreamed. But who would have thought that the noble Cecil and the brave Gustro would be so craven! Let's drink to our wedding, and then to the bridal chamber."

He drank his drink in one swallow. But Lady Agelica took from under her gown a golden flask and raising it, she cried, "I drink to you and future, whatever it is!" And she drained the golden flask and sat very still. A mist filled the room and swirled widdershams in thirty pillars

around the long oak-plank table and when it cleared there were thirty men between the Giant and the Lady.

The Juggler threw his golden balls into the air; the man with the dazzling eyes looked hard at the Giant; the student opened a book and read backward the wise saying of dead gods; the young Singer of Songs plucked his harp and sang of wonderful deeds of brave men long since worm food. But the fighting men rushed forward and, on all sides, started the battle. The Giant jumped back, picked a mace from the wall and fought as never man had fought before. He had two objectives: to kill the men and then to reach the smiling Lady and strangle her with bare hands for the thing she had done to him. But ever between him and the Lady was a wall of men who, with steel, song and the magic of flashing eyes, cascades of glittering balls and backward reading, formed a living wall that could be crushed and bent but never broken.

For years after, in the halls of Walling, the Singer of Songs told of that fight while the Hubelaires sat silent listening. No doubt, as the tale passed from one Singer, aged, to the next Singer, young, it became ornamented, embroidered and fabricated till it was somewhat different from what really happened that night. But even the bare truth-telling at first hand by the Lady Angelica was a great enough tale. For men fought, bled, and died in that hall. Finally the Giant, dying, broke through and almost reached the Lady, but the Song Man tripped him with his harp and the Wise Man threw his heavy tome in his face and the Juggler shattered his three golden balls against the Giant's forehead, and, at the lastward, the glittering eyes of the Sleep-Maker fastened on the dying ones of the Giant and sent him to his final slumber.

The Lady Angelica looked around her at the shattered hall and the thirty men who had done their part and she said softly: "These be brave men who have done what was necessary for the good of their country and the honor of the Hubelaires. I cannot forsake them or leave them hopeless," and she took the wine of synthesis and, drinking part, to every man she gave a drink, even to the dead men, whose lips she had to gently open and from whose gritted teeth she had to wipe the blood ere she could pour the wine into their breathless mouths. Then she went back to the table and, sitting there, she waited.

The mist again filled the room, covering the dead, the dying, and those who, though not fatally hurt, still panted from the fury of the battle. And when the mist cleared, only Lady Angelica was left there, for all the thirty had returned to her body through the magic of the synthetic wine.

"I feel old and in many ways different," the Lady whispered "for my strength has gone from me and I am glad there is no mirror to show my whitened hair and bloodless cheeks; the men who have come back into me were dead or badly hurt, and I must get back to my horse before I fall into a faint and die."

She tried to walk out of the room but, stumbling, fell. On hands and knees she crawled to where her horse waited for her. She pulled herself into the saddle and with her girdle tied herself there, and then she told the horse to go home. But she lay across the saddle like a dead woman.

The horse took her safely back to the Overlord's castle. Ladies in waiting laid her on her bed, washed her withered limbs and covered her wasted body with coverlets of lamb's wool and wise physicians gave her healing quaffs. Finally she recovered sufficiently to tell her father and her lover the story of the battle of the thirty warriors and wise men against the Giant and how he was dead and their land safe.

"And now go to the old man and get the other elixir," she whispered, "and when it works have the dead buried with honor and the wounded gently and wisely cared for. Thus we will come to the end of the adventure and it will be one that the Singer of Songs will tell for many winter evenings to the Hubelaires of Walling."

"You stay with her, Gustro," commanded the Overlord, "and I will take the wise Homunculus in my arms and gallop to the cave and secure the elixir from the old savant. When I return we will have her drink it and once again she will be young and whole. Then I will have you two lovers marry, for I am not as young as I was and I want to live to see the throne secure and, the gods willing, grandchildren running around the castle."

Gustro sat down by his lady's bed, took her wasted hand in his warm one, and placed a kiss on her white lips with his red ones. "No matter what happens and no matter what the end of the adventure, I will always love you, Heart-of-mine," he whispered. And Lady Angelica smiled on him and went to sleep.

Through the Dark Forest, Cecil, Overlord of Walling, galloped with the little wise man in his arms. He flung himself from his war-horse and ran quickly into the cave.

"Have you finished the elixir?" he cried.

The ancient looked up, as though in doubt as to what the question was. He was breathing heavily and little drops of sweat rolled down his leathered face.

"Oh yes, I remember now. The elixir that would save the lady and

take from her the thirty bodies of the men we placed in her by virtue of our synthetic magical wine. I remember now! I have been working on it. In a few more minutes it will be finished."

Dropping forward on the oak table he died. In falling, his withered hand struck a golden flask and overturned it on the floor. Liquid amber ran over the dust of ages. A cockroach came and drank of it and suddenly died.

"I am afraid," moaned the little Homunculus. "I wish I were back in my bottle."

But Cecil, Overlord of Walling, did not know how to comfort him.

The Reckoning

Our winner did not have it all the way this time, as the second in Dr. Keller's series took first place for a while; but this was the only contender, even though de Grandin and his friends nosed out the Cornwall story after a while and then finished well ahead in second place.

Most controversial this time was Donald A. Wollheim's parody-pastiche, of which two of you expressed positive dislike, while six rated it outstanding. From some of the comments on the part of those who praised it, I wonder if all of you realized that it was not intended as a genuine tale of horror, to arouse cold grue, but rather a spoof to arouse gentle mirth. Those who disliked it considered it on the cruel side; had I thought so—that the author either intended or unintentionally succeeded in making H. P. Lovecraft look ridiculous—I certainly would not have run the story. 'Twas but good-humored fun, and I feel reasonably certain that HPL would have chuckled over it himself; for while he was never satisfied with his work, and felt unhappy about what he considered failure to achieve his aim, he did not take himself with grim seriousness.

Only Dr. Keller and part two of the serial totally escaped destestation votes, although, as you'll see in the letter section, Quinn draws some dissent in particular matters. Nonetheless, most of you rated him high.

Lightning has struck the same place again; here's the breakdown: (1) *The Last Work of Pietro of Apono*, Steffan B. Aletti; (2) *The Devil's Bride* (part two), Seabury Quinn; (3) *The Sword and the Eagle*, David H. Keller, M. D.; (4) a tie between *Spawn of Inferno*, Hugh B. Cavé and *The Horror out of Lovecraft*, Donald A. Wollheim; (5) *At the End of Days*, Robert Silverberg.

Tales From Cornwall

by David H. Keller, M. D.

(author of *The Abyss*, *Heredity*, etc.)

No.5 The Battle Of The Toads

Although the fifth in the complete series, this was the first of the Cornwall tales to be published; and the following three chapters are in the same sequence as they were originally published in *WEIRD TALES*. We have seen touches of whimsy in the earlier chapters, as well as somewhat stronger touches of grue, but it is in the Cecil chapters that whimsy is supreme.

AS A YOUTH I SPENT SOME TIME in an Irish monastery learning to read, write and speak fluently in Latin; all of which seemed most important. From there I journeyed to the far East and lived in Arabia. I met many learned ancients who kindly taught me all they knew of alchemy, necromancy, and legerdemain. Finally, with no definite reason other than desire, I returned to the little town of Walling, in Armorica, where I had been born.

There I spent some time with my Uncle Cecil, Overlord of the Hube laires. He was still heartbroken over the death of his only child, the lady Angelica.

ARGUMENT FROM DATES

- 200 B. C. Folkes-King Eric rules in Wearfold, Norway. Olaf is Lord of the House of Wolves in Jutland.
- 190 B. C. Balder, son of Olaf, is born.
- 189 B. C. Thyra, daughter of Eric, is born.
- 171 B. C. Balder adventures to Wearfold, kills a giant and marries Thyra.
- 140 B. C. Odin, only son of Holga, is born.
- 100 B. C. The Wolves are driven from Jutland by the Norsemen. Balder is transmuted into an oak tree. Under the command of Lord Holga the Wolves sail southwest and find a new home in Armorica.
- 99 B. C. Harold, son of Odin, is born.
- 77 B. C. Edward, son of Harold, is born.
- 58 B. C. Edward adventures to the east and marries an eagle. She lays an egg, hatches a boy, changes to a woman and calls her son Cedl.
- 57 B. C. Caesar invades Gaul. The Wolves flee to Cornwall. Lord Harold dies and his son Edward becomes Lord. The family name is changed to Hubelatre.
- 43 A.D. Claudius conquers most of England and builds the Hadrian Wall.
- 350 A.D. The Romans are driven from England.
- 400 A.D. The Hubelaires are never conquered, but repeated sieges of their castle, destruction of their lands, and frequent pestilences so weaken them that they leave Cornwall and sail to the Isle of Lundy in the Hungry Sea. Here they build a walled town and live at peace for thirty years.
- 430 A.D. The Rathlings invade Lundy and attack the Hubelaires. After long fighting with heavy losses on both sides, peace is declared; but the Rathlings remain in Lundy.
- 440 A.D. The Rathlings break the peace and kill all the Hubelaires; but Raymond the Golden, before his death, becomes the father of two sons, Raymond and Doom.
- 462 A.D. Raymond and Doom destroy the Rathlings and then sail to Armorica, where they establish the little kingdom of Walling.
- 782 A.D. Cecil is Lord of the Hubelaires in Walling. His only daughter, Angelica, dies, after destroying a giant.

"Her death is more than a personal loss," he explained. "Had she lived and married Prince Gustavo and borne children the Hubelaire line would have remained unbroken. Your father was my only brother and you are his only son. You have adventured in far lands and have, perhaps, gained much wisdom. It would be well for you to live with me and, when I die, become Overlord of the Hubelaires. We are a little

people, and pride comprises most of our wealth; but our folk need a wise man to lead and care for them. It seems to me that it is your duty to prepare yourself against the time when you will be the Overlord."

"That is a kindly thought, Uncle, but I have other plans. I have talked to many of the old men of our family, and they say that once we ruled in Cornwall, where we had a mighty castle. My wish is to travel to that far land and in some way become Overlord of Cornwall, though at this time I have no idea how that can be accomplished. Because I have the determination of youth, there is nothing you can do that can change this plan."

"I regret your ambition, but it may be that you are directed in this by the gods, so I will not say you nay. Instead I shall give you a purse of gold and a parchment brought from the Isle of Lundy by our ancestor Raymond, son of Raymond the Golden. On this parchment is drawn a chart showing where family treasures were hid in the castle when our family fled from Cornwall. What these are I do not know, for their secret has been lost during the passing years. But if you find the castle you may recover them, and there is no one who has a better right to them than you. So speed on your way, and always remember that you are a Hubdaire."

Thus, in course of time, I sailed from Armorica in a little fishing boat. Whether by the seamanship of the captain or the prevailing winds, I finally landed on the coast of Cornwall. My charger, spavined, aged, thin, and blind of one eye, had not benefited by the voyage and within an hour after landing died. It being impossible for even a man of my great strength to make much headway on foot clad in armor, I sorrowfully hid most of it under some leaves, carefully marking the spot so I might recover the valuable items when opportunity permitted. Then I walked on with a dagger in my belt, and with my long sword and my shield pounding my back at every step.

In a few hours, tired and hungry, I came to a large castle centered in a green meadow. I was certain that it was the ancient home of my family and that no one, certainly none in Cornwall, had a better right to it than I had. But, to my great surprise, I found it occupied, for a peculiar-looking man in monk's clothing stood on the drawbridge, evidently waiting for me. My first thought was that he looked like a toad, and at once I was irritated by his presumption in living in the Hubdaire castle. I determined that when I ruled as Overlord of Cornwall I would at once evict him; but, at that time, I was not inclined to tell him how

I felt, for I was more in need of shelter, food, and a warm place by the fire than of an argument.

Making use of my best Latin, I explained to the monk who I was and where I had come from and assured him that I was a man of culture, meant him no harm, and was in sore need of any hospitality and refreshment he could afford me. He replied that he was the Abbe Rousseau and that the castle belonged to him, though some centuries earlier it had been possessed by an old family, who had finally deserted it. He had found it unoccupied and, with some of his friends, had taken habitation in it. He thought it would be no harm to entertain me, though as a rule strangers were never welcome. Finally he invited me to enter the castle.

It was twilight; his face was partially covered by a cowl; the pine split which he carried gave more smoke than flame. Thus, for more reasons than one, I did not glimpse his face after we had come to the banquet hall, where a fire blazed in the fireplace on one side. Leaving me there, he wended his way into the shadows and soon returned carrying a well-gnawed joint of meat, some hard bread, and a bottle of sour wine. On this feast I regaled myself with an eagerness born of hunger, rather than with the enjoyment of an epicurian.

After eating all there was I thanked my host. Now, as he stood before the fire warming his withered shins and facile hands I first saw him clearly. Those hands, dead white, with large blue veins coursing over them—those hands with long, hungry fingers and uncut nails—caused me to shiver; for the fingers moved in aimless fashion, as though alive and independent of the man they were attached to; which was a thought I had never had of the fingers of any man I had ever seen.

But stranger yet, and far more soul-rocking, was the man's face. Of course it was the face of man. It was easy to tell that it was a man who had admitted me, fed me, and now stood before the fire, ready to talk. I told myself bitterly that I was a fool to think otherwise of one who had so hospitably entertained me, yet there was something about that face, so intermittently illumined by the dancing flames, that thoroughly chilled me and made me hurriedly clutch the gold crucifix that hung around my neck—for there was something about the face of the man that reminded me of a toad.

The thin, bloodless lips were tightly compressed and stretched wide across a face that was remarkable for the receding forehead and shrunken cheeks. The skin was like parchment, thin parchment of a slightly green tinting—and now and then, as the Abbe stood in silent meditation, he

breathed into his closed mouth and puffed those thin cheeks like a fish bladder; then he looked more than ever like a toad.

Of course I could not express my thoughts. A Christian Knight, who always should try to be a gentleman, does not eat the food of a stranger, thus accepting his hospitality, and then repay him by telling him how much he looks like a toad. At least, I avoided acting that way, though there was no harm in my thinking and I most certainly thought hard.

The Abbe asked me why I was wayfaring in Cornwall, where I had spent my youth, and what experience I had in warfare. To all these questions I gave answers that had a great deal of truth in them, though I was unwilling to confide in him that I was a Hubelaire, had come to claim our ancestral home, and regarded him as an interloper who would at once be thrown out of the castle if and when I became Overlord of Cornwall. He seemed well pleased with all I had to say, and more and more he tottered on feet which seemed longer than the feet of most men; faster and faster he puffed out his cheeks, breaking into my remarks, with a strange puffing of wind which, to my excited fancy, sounded like the *croak, croak, croak* of bullfrogs at the breeding season. Then, when I came to an end he told me of himself.

"Fair sir, who say you are Cœcil, son of James, grandsom of David and even a descendant of Raymond, whoever he might be, but give no facts about your family or their name, you have come to Cornwall in good time and your arrival at this castle is indeed opportune. As you may have surmised, I am not a native of this wild land, nor are my friends whom you will see tonight. Some of us are from France, others from Bohemia, and a few from the far lands beyond Tartary in the deserts of Gobi; but we are all brothers, bound together by ties of blood, desire, and a great ambition which will soon be disclosed to you. Yet, while we all excel in necromancy and have knowledge of much that is weird and deadly, none is skilled in arms and the use of weapons of offense and defense. This is not due to any lack of courage—oh, believe me, Fair Sir, when I say that it is not due to any lack of courage or daring, but rather to certain physical defects which prevent us from taking part in the brave art of war, the delight of most men. So we gain our ends by other means. But tonight we must have a man who will fight for us, if there be need of fighting. I hope that such will not be the case, still, there may be need of fighting—yes, there is no doubt there will be use for a sharp sword, though it might be better were you to use your dagger."

"Oh, as for that," I replied with forced bravery, "I can use whichever

is the most needed. Personally, I prefer the two-handed sword which I carry on my back, but perhaps if there is not much room and the light is not of the best, the dagger would be the weapon of choice. Now, in previous slaying of giants I always felt that the sword was better, because there always comes a time when it is necessary to carve off their heads, and, of course, that is slow work with a dagger. Yet, in a little melee I had with a one-eyed dragon in a cave on the Canary Isle, I obtained much pleasure in blinding him with one stroke of the dagger, and the next moment the point found his heart. You would have enjoyed that little fight, Abbe and I am sure that had you seen it, you would have full confidence in my ability to handle any emergency that may arise tonight."

The Abbe smiled. "I like you. On my word, I like you. I am so impressed with you that I am almost tempted to ask you to become one of the Brethren. That may come later. But to the point of my tale: We are gathered here tonight to witness the overcoming of one of our greatest and most troublesome enemies. For centuries he has outwitted us and caused us grief. More than one of the Brethren has come to his death through the evil machinations of this fiend. But at last we have foiled him, and tonight we will kill him. Naturally, when he dies, his power will come to us; and with that additional power there is no telling to what heights of fame the Brethren will rise. We will kill him. For centuries he has boasted of his immortality, his greatness, his imperviousness to harm; yet tonight we will kill him.

"I misspoke myself. We will not kill him. I will do it! That is what pleases me so. All of us are powerful, but I am just a little stronger than the other Brothers. So I am going to kill this enemy, and when I do, I will rule all men on Earth, and perhaps those on other stars. I long to go into space, to conquer stars other than this one on which we live."

"I will kill him tonight. I have this man in a glass bottle which, by craft, I induced him to enter. Once there, he took a new shape—and was it not a pleasant thing that he took the shape he did? It gave me the power and the glory—world without end—no, no, no! I did not intend to say that—not yet, not at this time! I am not powerful enough to defy God." His voice sank to a whine. "Not yet, but perhaps in a few hours; after I have added to my power the strength of the dead fiend.

"This evil one in the bottle cannot be killed by poison, steel, fire,

water, or the prevention of breathing. There is no weapon powerful enough to destroy him; but tonight he dies. For he is inside the glass bottle and I am on the outside, and he had voluntarily assumed the shape that makes it possible for me to kill him, through the glass. Can you understand? The glass is transparent. He has to look at me. I shall look at him, and in that glance lies his death. Soon he will shrivel, grow smaller, little by little he will lose form till he lies, a few drops of slime, a twisted mass of softened bones, at the bottom of the bottle. This bottle has a glass stopper, made with the greatest cunning. In the hollow center are ashes from the bones of holy men, tears that fell from the eyes of Mary, and a drop of sweat from the brow of a tortured saint. These sacred relics of the past will hold the fiend's soul a prisoner. After he has turned to slime I will remove the stopper and suck his spirit into me. No longer having a body to dwell in, his spirit will be glad to inhabit me and thus I will have the strength, power and glory of the Great One who Once ruled Hell. Is this not clever?"

"Indeed it is," I replied, with a lilt to my voice and a nausea in the pit of me. "But why do you have me in this drama? You say my sword and dagger are useless against this Evil One."

"You will guard me, fair youth. You, who are so brave, full of desire, and longing to be someone before you die, have been sent here by fate at a most opportune moment, to protect me if I need such help. Can you not see the position I will be in? There I am, with my mouth clasped over the mouth of the bottle, all ready to breathe in the spirit that will make me the greatest of all men, living or dead. Suppose, just before I breathe, one of the Brethren—and I particularly suspect the man from Gobi—slips a dagger through my heart and takes my place as the breather-in of this great power. How horrible this would be! What a sad ending to my dreams of empire! I have planned and plotted it all and now have brought it to pass. Why should I, at the lastward, be denied the right to become Emperor of the Powerful Ones, simply because a Chinese dagger is plunged through my heart? I know you will protect me.

"Oh, promise me that you will be at my back and see to it that none of the Brethren acts wrongfully! Will you promise that? In return I will see that you are paid. What do you wish most? Gold? Power? The love of a beautiful woman? Let me look into your eyes. Oh, lovely! You are a true brother of mine, for I see that you desire a warm room, filled with a library of many books, old manuscripts and curious volumes. I will give you all of these and thus prove to you that I reward those who

help me in my hour of peril. What say you if I reward you by placing in this library a copy of *Elephantis*? Some think Nero destroyed them all, but I know where one copy is. Will you guard me if I give you all this?"

"I certainly will," I replied almost enthusiastically, as I pictured myself sitting before a warm fire enjoying *Elephantis* in a purely philosophical manner. Of course I wanted much more than a library, but I thought it unwise to mention my ambitions at this time. I was not too well acquainted with the Abbe and, after all, it is best not to be too precipitous in confidences.

The Abbe seemed pleased. He insisted on kissing me on both cheeks, after the French fashion.

I wish to say at this time, that though I had performed many brash acts of derring-do in my short life, such as subduing single-handed the Yellow Ant of Fargons (eight feet tall and very deadly in its poison) and facing undaunted the Mystic Mere Woman of the Western Seas, still the bravest moment of my life was when I withstood the toad kiss of the Abbe and did not scream; for I wanted to—oh, how I longed to howl out my fear to the listening owls and scorpions! But of course such conduct would have been unseemly in the future Overlord of Cornwall. So I smiled, and vowed him my vows and told him to be sure not to forget the copy of *Elephantis* and would he kindly refresh me with more wine before the evening's performance began?

It was later—an eternity of waiting for me, but perhaps only an hour or so in actual minutes—that we foregathered in a lower room of the castle. A light shone in the room, though where it came from was only one more thing to worry me. Near one wall was a stool, and in front of it a low table, and on that table something tall and round, covered by a square of velvet tapestry. The Abbe sat on the stool while I stood behind him fingering the handle of my favorite dagger, the ivory handle carved in the semblance of a woman. The glistening blade below her naked body had kissed more than one brave man and foul monster to death.

Then from crevices in the wall—yes, perhaps from cracks in the floor, or so it seemed to my fevered fancy—the Brethren came into being and gathered in a semicircle around the table. Their faces were toad-like, similar to the face of the Abbe. There they stood, and I said to my knees, "Remember the honor of the Hubelaires!" and I whispered to my jaws, "Be silent and remember the bravery of thy grandsire David!" but in

spite of these admonitions my knees and jaws castanetted, to my sore dismay.

From the Abbe came a croak, and a low chorus of answering croaks came from the men who stood around me. I looked into their faces and in the shifting, shimmering light saw for a certainty the same toad-like features that had so amazed me when I first saw them in the face of the Abbe. Before I could properly conceal my astonishment the Abbe took a chalice from a niche in the wall, and, after doing that which seemed rather indecorous, took it in both hands and gave each of the Brethren a drink from it. What the drink was, I, at that time, could only imagine, but later, after deep study of Satanism, I frequently shuddered at my narrow escape that night. Fortunately I was not asked to join in the draining of the cup.

Seating himself on the stool, the Abbe bade me take the cover from off the thing that was both tall and round. I did so, and there was a large glass bottle with a giant toad squatting at the bottom. There was no difficulty in seeing every part of this toad, especially his face and eyes, as the glass was of a wonderful clearness. He faced the Abbe—and the eyes of these two, one a daemon-toad and the other a man-toad, glowed ghoulishly at each other. Between them, separated by thousands of years of different thinking, conflicting ambitions, antagonistic personalities, waged a conflict of souls, such as rarely has been fought on Earth or any other place, so far as I know; though, of course, I am not all-wise concerning the other planets—or this one either, for that matter.

They glared at each other, each striving for supremacy, each trying to destroy the other. I could not see the eyes of the Abbe, but I could clearly see the eyes of the imprisoned toad were shining with supreme confidence. Did the Abbe see in them what I saw?

He must have! For he tried to escape. Three times he endeavored to arise and flee, and each time he was pulled back down on to stool and his face and eyes were drawn closer to the eyes peering at him so derisively through the clear glass wall. Then, with a low moan, the poor man slumped silently forward and even before my eyes he melted, first into a jelly and then into evil, odiferous slime running over the floor, but partly absorbed and held together by the clothing of what had once been the Abbe Rousseau.

As he died, the toad inside the bottle grew larger and assumed human shape. He turned around slowly in the bottle, and, in his turning, looked at each of the Brethren and after that look they stood still, unable to

move, and over the face of each dropped the hideous mask of uttermost despair. Now the man in the bottle looked at me. Well, let him look all he wanted to! I was holding fast to my cross and I knew the power of the cork to hold him inside his crystal prison. If his glare became too powerful I could shut my eyes; at least I thought I could.

But those eyes did not try to harm me. They seemed kindly and gentle. Then the man raised his arms in the air three times and his lips made three definite and magical movements. Interested and amazed I recalled that appeal for help, having learned it in Araby when I was raised from the grave by the lion's grip, the Lion of the House of Judah. What could the man mean by giving me this sign? Was it a coincidence? An accident? Or was he indeed a frater of mine?

Of course I knew what he wanted, so I pulled out the cork.

He passed through the neck of the bottle and jumped to the floor, a small man dressed in black velvet, with glistening hair and a most pleasing smile, which in some way warmed my heart and removed much of my apprehension.

He paid no attention to me but passed slowly in front of the toad-faced Brethren, and as he passed they moaned in anguish and, falling on their faces before him, tried to kiss his feet. It was this act of adoration that caused me to look at his feet; and, utterly astonished, I saw they were hoofed and hairy, like those of a goat.

Finally he passed all the Brethren and, turning, made a sign, at which their ending was in all respects like that of the Abbe. They too turned to slime, naught being left on the floor save their clothing and the toad-juice oozing from it. Then he came to where I was standing, braced against the wall to keep from falling, and he said merrily: "Well, Cecil, my good fellow and rare sib, how goes the evenings?"

"Pleasant enough," I replied, "with first one divertissement and then another. In fact, it has been profitable for me in many ways."

"Lad," he said kindly, gripping me by the shoulder, and in that grip was the warmth of human comradeship, "you showed rare discernment in releasing me from that bottle. Of course I could have broken it, but there was something about your face that pleased me and I wanted to test you. I found that you also had been in the East, in Araby, and when I asked for help you gave it. These toad-men have worried me for years. I have tried to destroy them, for they hurt my cause, but never till to-night, and then only by outwitting them, could I gather them together in one room. There is only one left, and I do not think he will trouble me. I warrant that the Abbe was surprised. He had experimented and

killed many a real toad, but, of course, I was not a toad, just had the appearance of one for the time being. Well, that is over with and I can go back to better and happier occupations. But you really did let me out, and, perhaps, the magic of the cork was stronger than I thought. So I will grant you three requests, my dear sib—ask for anything you desire."

My heart was in my mouth but, nevertheless, I spoke up bravely.

"Give me the power to conquer all giants, robbers, knaves, salamanders, ogres, serpents, dragons and all evil things, male and female, on, beneath and above Earth wherever and whenever I come into conflict with them."

"That is a lot of power, but I will grant it."

"Then, in this castle I want a library, a very fine one. A very long time ago a woman wrote a book called *Elephantis*. I would like that book in the library."

The man laughed. "I heard the Abbe tell you about that book. Do you know that I was well acquainted with the girl who wrote it? In fact I put some of the facts contained in that book into her head. Well, I will give you the library and the book. Have you no desire for temporal power?"

"Yes. This castle we are in, though part ruins, was once the home of my family, the Hubelaires. I would like to have it restored to its former grandeur and to live in it as the Overlord of Cornwall."

"That is a simple matter to arrange, a mere bagatelle." Then he opened his closed hand and in the palm lay a golden key strung on a black silk cord. This he suspended around my neck, saying, "This is the sign patent of your authority. Always remember the words on it:

THEY WHO HOLD THE GOLDEN KEY SHALL EVER LORDS OF CORNWALL-BE.

Guard it well if you wish to remain Overlord. Now I really must be on my way. I wish you a long life and a merry one" Immediately he vanished, amid the hooting of owls.

All around me stirred new life in stone and plaster. I walked slowly through the long halls, now clean of the dust of centuries. Finally I came to the banquet hall, where men-at-arms awaited my command and little pages ran to ask me my desires.

Walking slowly, as in a dream, I mounted the winding stairway and climbed to the topmost tower. There I met a sturdy warrior, standing

watch over the safety of the castle. It was a beautiful night, starlighted and with a full moon. Far down the winding road came the blare of trumpets and the pleasant music of horses' hooves on the hard clay and the ringing clash of sword against armor at each step of a charger. Now and then, mingled with the noise of many men, came the peal of women's laughter.

"What means this cavalcade advancing toward the castle?" I gruffly asked the warrior.

"These be the great men of Cornwall, with their ladies and knights and all their men-at-arms, who wend their way through the night to bid you welcome to Cornwall and humbly acknowledge you as their Overlord," he replied, smiling.

"That is as it should be," I made answer. "Go and command that all be prepared against their coming. And, when they arrive, bid the nobles to come to me. They will find me in the library."



Tales From Cornwall

by David H. Keller, M.D

(author of *The Abyss, Heredity, etc.*)

No.6 The Tailed Man Of Cornwall

The selection of *Tales From Cornwall* by DAVID H. KELLER, M.D. (1880 - 1966) which ran in *WEIRD TALES* all dealt with the humorous and whimsical Cecil, self-appointed Overlord of the area; there were four of them, and they were published in the proper order, the last of this part of the series appearing in the October 1930 issue. Now we see that instead of being the first four stories of the entire series, they are actually the fifth to eighth stories, and that the earlier ones were somewhat different in tone. It is one of the ironies of history that if, at one time, the Irish believed that the men of Cornwall all had tails, at a later date the marauding English and Scotch, under Cromwell, would send back reports that the Irish had tails.

ARGUMENT FROM DATES

- 200 B. C. Folkes-King Eric rules in Wearfold, Norway. Olaf is Lord of the House of Wolves in Jutland.
- 190 B. C. Balder, son of Olaf, is born.
- 189 B. C. Thyra, daughter of Eric, is born.
- 171 B. C. Balder adventures to Wearfold, kills a giant and marries Thyra.
- 140 B. C. Odin, only son of Holga, is born.
- 100 B. C. The Wolves are driven from Jutland by the Norsemen. Balder is transmuted into an oak tree. Under the command of Lord Holga the Wolves sail southwest and find a new home in Armorica.
- 99 B. C. Harold, son of Odin, is born.
- 77 B. C. Edward, son of Harold, is born.
- 58 B.C. Edward adventures to the east and marries an eagle. She lays an egg, hatches a boy, changes to a woman and calls her son Cecil.
- 57 B. C. Caesar invades Gaul. The Wolves flee to Cornwall. Lord Harold dies and his son Edward becomes Lord. The family name is changed to Hubelatre.
- 43 A.D. Claudius conquers most of England and builds the Hadrian Wall.
- 350 A.D. The Romans are driven from England.
- 400 A.D. The Hubelaitres are never conquered, but repeated sieges of their castle, destruction of their lands, and frequent pestilences so weaken them that they leave Cornwall and sail to the Isle of Lundy in the Hungry Sea. Here they build a walled town and live at peace for thirty years.
- 430 A.D. The Rathlings invade Lundy and attack the Hubelaitres. After long fighting with heavy losses on both sides, peace is declared; but the Rathlings remain in Lundy.
- 440 A.D. The Rathlings break the peace and kill all the Hubelaitres; but Raymond the Golden, before his death, becomes the father of two sons, Raymond and Doom.
- 462 A.D. Raymond and Doom destroy the Rathlings and then sail to Armorica, where they establish the little kingdom of Walling.
- 782 A.D. Cecil is Lord of the Hubelaitres in Walling. His only daughter, Angelica, dies after destroying a giant.
- 783 A.D. Cecil, nephew of Lord Cecil, adventures to Cornwall and becomes the Overlord of that country. He lives in the castle of the Hubelaitres, first occupied by his family in 57 B. C.

FOR SEVERAL DAYS I WAS more than busy receiving the great men of Cornwall, who, driven by some mysterious urge which no one fully comprehended but myself, had thronged to the castle to acknowledge me as their Overlord. The statements they made to me concerning my fitness for this position were most flattering, yet, at the same

time, as I heard their petitions to have this or that giant killed and one or another of the land's enemies driven out or destroyed, I felt there was certainly a large amount of work connected with my new position of authority. Still, I told all of them that just as soon as I could I would attend to all these minor adventures, because if I was to be Overlord of Cornwall I wanted that land to be peaceful, quiet, and safe. They were delighted with my promises and departed thoroughly convinced of my power to do all they had asked of me. Of course, there was no doubt in my mind as to my ability to perform any great act of chivalry that fell to my lot, for I was certain of my cleverness in fighting against any evil man or animal, even without help; but at the same time it was pleasing to know that in any conflict I would have the assistance of the little man I had rescued from the glassbottle on the occasion of the Battle of the Toads.

Finally it seemed all my nobles had departed from the castle, which gave me great pleasure, for so far I had used my library only as a consultation room and had found no time to do more than glance at the shelves of bound manuscripts. To my great interest I found on a low table on one side of the room a most-peculiar ebony box on the top of which was inlaid the letter H. I carried this over to the central table and opened it. Inside was a book of blank vellum pages elegantly bound in leather, along with a large pot of black ink and a number of goose quill pens. These gave me an inspiration. For some years I had longed to write a history of my life, feeling certain that if I lived long enough I would have many interesting tales to place in proper order and thus give future Hubelaires an accurate account of the adventures of one of their great men. Now I had vellum, ink and quills and, since there seemed nothing imperative to stop me, I decided to start my narrative. But first I placed in the back of this book the chart given to me by my uncle showing the location of our family treasures, not wishing it to be lost and yet not wishing to have the search interfere with my writing.

Unwilling to be disturbed, I sent a page for my seneschal, Aethelstan. He was an old man but very capable and had cared for my guests in a most efficient manner.

"How go the affairs of the castle this morning?" I asked. "I have had no visitors, so I judge the nobles have all departed. This pleases me, for I long to be at peace and divert myself with literary work that, for some time, has demanded attention."

"There still remains one of your guests, my Lord," he replied. "He is Lord FitzHugh, last of a very ancient and honorable Cornwall family.

Usually he has a pleasing personality, but since coming here with the other nobles he has been in a dour humor. During all the days he has eaten your meat he has never smiled. The gossips say he had ambitions — wanted to become the Overlord — and, of course, since your coming to Cornwall that has been impossible."

"Strange," I mused. "He has not asked to see me."

"That may be for the best. He may be looking to slip a dagger into you."

"I hope not. Such a stroke would deprive me of much future pleasure and prevent me from doing all I wish for the welfare of my country." At the same time I stroked the Golden Key and determined to keep it always on me. My friend had promised that I would become Overlord, but had not said for how long.

"Send the Lord to me," I commanded. "It would be best to talk matters over with him. Suggest to him that it would be best to come without a dagger, for I have magical powers he wots not of."

FitzHugh came to the library, and there was no doubt that he was far from happy. But I found that I had completely misjudged the poor fellow. He was not worrying about his loss of power, but about the loss of something far more precious to him, his fair lady love.

He was evidently fond of the finer things in life and, in the peace of my library, in front of the fire, he lost no time at all in unburdening himself and telling me of his great sorrow.

"I am a man of Cornwall," he began. "My family have always lived in Cornwall. Perhaps I would have been wiser had I never left it; but, like many young knights, I had to go adventuring. Fate took me to Ireland, and Boy Cupid introduced me to Queen Broda. When we met, doves flew over us and a sparrow lighted on her golden chariot. It was love at first sight, but the sad hap was that she did not know I was from Cornwall. She rules mightily over a large part of Ireland, and there her word is law, but she loved me and the fact I was poor made little difference in the sweetness of her kisses. We were ready to marry, but when she found that I was a Cornwall man, she simply told me that she would never marry me, even if I was the last man on earth."

"That was a very positive statement," I suggested.

"It was, and there is no doubt she meant it. Then I came home, and since then it has made little difference to me whether I was ever to be Overlord or even whether I was alive or dead. For, to be happy, I must have Broda for wife, and for her to be happy she must have me

for her lover, and yet she says it can never be simply because I am a man of Cornwall."

"'Tis a sad tale," I agreed, "and I suppose you want my help?"

"That is why I lingered."

"Did she give any reason for her cruel refusal of your love?"

"That in very truth she did. She said that all Cornwall men have tales of braggadocio and other tails, the very thought of which filled her with fear."

"Do you mean that she believed you to be a tailed man?"

"Yes. That is what she said."

"Of course she must have some reason for such an idea."

"She certainly must."

"Naturally, if she really thought so, we cannot blame her for not wishing to marry you. Under the circumstances the lady showed rare judgement and a very fine discrimination. But why did you not show her she was wrong?"

"I tried to in every way I could but in the argument she said twenty words to my one, which is a way women have of winning an argument. I told her that I was as tailless as any of her Irishmen, but she simply cried and said she could not trust me and how would she feel after we were married and she could not undo it, to find that I had lied to her. I told her that I was a true man and spoke the truth, and she retorted that thus had all men spoken to women since the days of Knight Aeneas and Lady Dido and none were to be trusted, especially one with a tail."

"Oh, these women! These women!" I sadly remarked, shaking my head.

"Have you ever been in love?" he asked dolefully.

"No. I have had so many more important adventures to accomplish that there has been neither time nor inclination to fiddle-faddle and waste my time over such a frail, inconsequential part of life as women."

"Then you don't know anything about them. Ever try to argue with a mad woman?"

"Positively no. When I was in Araby a very wise man gave me this sage bit of philosophy: 'He who argues with a woman is a fool and he who tries to argue with an angry woman is a damned fool.' So I leave them alone except when they become too dangerous, and then I simply kill them."

"I thought you could help me," he sighed, "but I would not want you to kill her. Then I would have to kill myself, and our spirits would

wander by the water of Lethe, seeing each other every day, yet unable to realize that we ever knew each other."

"Cheer up," I said; "I may be able to help you. I think I will send for this haughty queen and explain a few things to her. Can I tell her positively that you have no tail?"

"That is something you will have to decide for yourself," was all the satisfaction FitzHugh would give me.

"I think you ought to be candid with me," I cautioned him, shrugging my shoulders. "I am Overlord of a country which I hope some day will be a great realm. One of the foundations of my land will be honesty and fair dealings with our neighbors. Thus we may hope to escape devastating wars. Suppose, on my word of honor as a true Overlord, I tell this lady that you have no tail, and on the strength of my say-so she marries you and then she finds that I told her wrong? Think how she would feel! She probably would cut off both your head and your tail and come to Cornwall to revenge herself on me. So it is very important that I know certainly about this problem."

"You will simply have to make up your mind, form your own opinion." He was so stubborn that I was on the point of telling him to be gone but, on learning that he lived only a few hours' ride from my castle, I suggested that I ride with him and spend a few days in his company. This seemed to cheer him, and he at once urged me to do so. He told me his mother was a fine old dame and had lovely roses and a complete herb garden where she raised simples for the healing of their folk.

In fact, I was greatly pleased with Dame FitzHugh. She was a very pleasant lady, quite witty and at the same time remarkably learned. Though greatly distressed over the unhappiness of her son, she spared no effort to make my short visit a pleasant one, and we had several very interesting and profitable conversations in the privacy of her rose garden. Then I left them, promising that I would do what I could as soon as I could and assuring them that I was certain everything would turn out in a most happy manner to the great satisfaction of FitzHugh.

It was a fortunate happening that I returned to the Hubelaire castle when I did. While the nobles of Cornwall were perfectly willing for me to be their Overlord, the men of Wales had some different ideas. In fact, they had a candidate of their own. Ambassadors were waiting for me who said that unless I left the country at once they would secure the help of Queen Broda, who hated Cornwall more than she hated Hell, and they

would come over my land and replace all the dead Cornwall men with first-class Welshmen.

I consulted with several of my mightiest knights. It was their opinion that if the Welshmen came by themselves it would be an even fight, but if the Irish became their allies it would be hard to overcome them. They were certain that all of Cornwall would be loyal to me, but there was no doubt they were afraid of this Irish queen. Of course the little man I had befriended had kept his promise and made me Overlord but, after all, he had made no definite promise as to how long I was to retain that honor and, thus far, I had had no opportunity to test the efficacy of the magic words on the Golden Key. However, I decided to act bravely and told the Welsh ambassadors to hurry back to their own land and tell their King, Harold Dha, to mind his own affairs and stay out of Cornwall or I would work a magic on him that he would always remember.

I had a hard time enjoying the library that evening. Even the manuscript of *Elephantis* failed to thrill me. I told myself that this matter of politics was a most unsatisfactory one and, just as soon as I could, I would retire to a very quiet place such as Avalon-by-the-Sea.

The next day was stormy. So was the next day and on the third day frightened runners came and told of a large Irish army marching toward my castle; and soon after other runners told of a Welsh force within a day's march. Thus, before I could gather together my own nobles and their warriors the Hubelaire castle was almost surrounded, the Irish on one side and the Welsh on the other. It was safe enough with the drawbridge raised, but in a rather sorry situation for the Overlord of a great county.

Then to make the affair more complicated, Queen Broda asked for an interview with me. Her herald, a most interesting old man, said she plotted no treachery, but that, if I doubted her word, I could be accompanied by some hundred warriors. This was most complimentary, as I had less than thirty fighting men at that time in the castle. The herald said the queen preferred privacy and wished to meet me alone that night on the grassy green before the drawbridge. I told the herald I would be there and alone as the queen requested.

I spent the afternoon in moody silence in the library, trying to imagine what the lady wanted and what would satisfy her, but I finally give it up as something that was hopeless, as there seemed to be no telling what

she wanted, and, as far as I knew, no man had ever satisfied a woman — at least he had not lived to boast of it.

So, to pass the time, I read of the temptations of Saint Anthony, and a most weary time he had of it, what with the desert dust and the lively women he did not yield to— at least he boasted that he did not yield. Suddenly, to my great surprise, two men walked into the library: young FitzHugh and the unusual person who had by his mystical powers made me Overlord of Cornwall. My mysterious friend was dressed as a priest, but I had no difficulty recognizing him, especially when I looked at his feet.

"Hail, my dear sib," he said with a lilt in his voice, "and how do you like your new position of power?"

"In a way it is most satisfactory," I replied, "but with the Irish on one side of the castle and the Welsh on the other I feel somewhat like a squirrel in a cage. How did you and my loyal FitzHugh come here?"

"By a secret tunnel. We bring you news. The nobles of Cornwall have come to your aid. The entire country is in arms. Belvidere, Mallory, and Arthur have surrounded the Welsh King and are only waiting for your command to crush Harold Dha and his entire force. Now all you have to accomplish is to make your peace with Queen Broda and the Welsh must make peace or die."

"This is far better than I expected," I replied, "but it seems to me that the hardest part has been left to me, for you and my loyal Cornwall knights have only solved the Welsh problem, while I am left to deal with a woman."

"Use your charm, Cecil," the priest advised.

After supper I donned my best and walked slowly over the drawbridge to the grassy spot in front of the castle.

Queen Broda sat silent in her golden chariot. She was rather easy to look at and I certainly could not blame young FitzHugh for his infatuation. In fact I even considered the possibility of explaining to her that I was from France and that things might come to a worse pass than uniting our forces and giving the Welsh a sound thrashing, followed at an appropriate moment by a marriage that would unite the kingdoms of Ireland and Cornwall. But there was a determined glint in her eye and a pert way of holding her head that made me feel it would be best for me if I could induce her to take FitzHugh on faith— perhaps I could do more with some other woman than I could with her— maybe FitzHugh could handle her better and more easily.

She did not wait for me even to introduce myself, but began, "Are you going to give me what I want?"

"Well, that depends. So far, I have not the least idea of what you desire. Now if you want me to help you fight the Welsh, I think we can come to an understanding."

"Don't be silly. I had another reason for coming to Cornwall than thrashing the Welsh, though I have every reason to hate them. Harold Dha was foolish enough to think I would marry him, and his offer was a deadly insult. I just want one thing, and that is the head of your Lord FitzHugh."

I raised my eyebrows slightly.

"Why Queen Broda! I am astonished. I thought you and the young man were friendly. It would be too bad to deprive him of his head, and he so young and wonderfully debonair. What can the poor fellow have done, that you treat him thus?"

"He courted me and when I promised to marry him, told me that he was of Cornwall."

"Well, what of that? He had to be from somewhere, did he not?"

"Now, listen to me, Cecil, son of James and grandson of David, you who hold your place as Overlord by some chicanery that has caused endless talk in this part of the world. In my country we have elephants, cametunnus, metacollinarum, white and red lions. We have satyrs, pigmies and forty-ell giants, but we have no tailed men, and we most certainly are not going to have any, at least not as the husband of Queen Broda; so I have crossed the Irish Sea for the head of this man who has insulted me."

"Ireland," I replied, "must be a most interesting country. Have you ever heard of what we have in Cornwall? Have travelers told you of our Cyclopes, fauns, and centaurs; of our wild oxen, hyenas, and lamias; of our white merles, our crickets, and men with eyes before and behind? Just as soon as I can I intend to destroy all these evil monsters, and I really am surprised, Queen Broda—in fact I cannot understand at all—why it is you have allowed your fair land to be overrun by such trash as you tell of. Allow me to offer my services after I have cleansed Cornwall of its monstrosities. Did you know I have magical powers? How surprised were Gog and Magog when I conquered them, and Agit and Aginandi were absolutely dumbfounded when I bound them in chains and cast them into the Mare Nostrum. I have eaten of the plant Assidos, which protects the eater from evil spirits. I wear on my body the stone called Nudiosi, which prevents the sight from growing feeble and makes

it possible for the wearer to see a great distance. For example, at this very moment, I can see how this matter is going to end."

I could see that she was impressed, for she replied, "Just from looking at you, Lord Cecil, one would hardly believe you had all these powers; yet there must be something about you, because in no time at all you have assumed great authority here."

"Well, it is hard to tell about a man just by looking at him. But tell me one thing; what put this idea into your head about Lord Fitzhugh having a tail?"

"He is a man of Cornwall and all men of that land are thus shaped.

Are you sure?"

"Certainly. You are not doubting my word, are you? You will not call me a liar. It happened this way. Years ago a saintly priest visited Strode, one of your villages, determined to convert the people and have them accept the Christian way of life. The Cornwall men living in that place, wishing to put a mark of contumely on the godly man, did not scruple to cut the tail off the horse he was riding. For this profane and inhospitable act, they covered themselves with eternal reproach. Since then all the men of Cornwall have been born with tails and no such man shall ever sit by my side and help me rule Ireland. The only way I can ease my pride is to take his head back with me"—here the poor lady began to cry—"and he should have thought of that and how it would make me feel, before he did speak of love to me. How would it be for me to be the mother of a poor little princess with a tail like an ape or a monkey?"

"That would not do at all," I replied in my most soothing way, and when I try to soothe the ladies I usually succeed. I remember very well how I completely changed the desire of a lady in Araby. At first she was minded to kill me, but by my power and a certain talisman I carried I compelled her to other ideas. So I soothingly said: "That would not do at all. But how would it be if, by my magic, I removed his tail? Suppose I made Lord Fitzhugh like other men? Would you still demand his head?"

"Don't be silly," she replied archly. "Of course I would rather marry him than kill him, but I had no thought such like could be done. You mean without a scar? And if there was a little baby, would she be all right? Just like any other little baby?"

"If I promise you everything will be all right, everything *will* be all right. All you need do is trust me. Of course it will take a powerful magic. I will at once begin my sorcery, and it would be best to begin

with rhadomancy; later I may have to use the blood of a newborn child, but I would rather not do that unless it become necessary. Lord Fitz-Hugh is at present in the castle. Tomorrow you can be my guest for supper. I will invite King Harold Dha to join us. Since he is practically my prisoner he will be glad to eat with us and sign at that time a treaty of friendship, which he probably will keep, knowing he cannot fight both Cornwall and Ireland. After supper you, Fitz-Hugh and I will go to my special cavern in the bowels of the earth, under my castle, and there I will do what is necessary to your lover and make him closer to your heart's desire."

"Promise me that it won't hurt him much?"

"Not as much as cutting off his head. Of course he may moan a little, but he is quite a brave man and I am certain he will be glad to endure the pain for your sake. I suppose you are anxious to return to Ireland at once, a happily married woman. But you must promise me one thing: Since I am doing this feat of magic to restore your lover to you, I would appreciate it if you moved part of your army so they could aid my warriors and thus show this Welshman that further resistance is useless; this will help greatly to make this a bloodless war."

She promised, and further said that she would gladly join me at supper on the morrow. When I left her she was seated silent in her golden chariot, but there was a look of happiness and hope on her lovely face.

Back in the castle I gave orders to my seneschal to prepare a proper feast for the next evening, as I would have Queen Broda, King Harold Dha, four of my nobles, and another very important personage as my guests. I sent a messenger to the King requesting his attendance at this banquet and suggesting that he had best come unarmed and with only one knight to attend him. Then I returned to the library, where Fitz-Hugh and the priest waited for me.

"What did she want?" asked the young Lord.

"A relatively simple request," I replied. "Either I will have to remove your tail or she will demand the right to remove your head. One or the other, or this wild Irish colleen of yours will join forces with the Welsh and wash Cornwall in blood. So off comes your tail."

"No one can take my tail off," he answered, surly and sad.

"And why not?"

"You know why," was all he would say.

Certainly in that mood he was no fit playmate for a girl like Queen

Broda. I saw that I would have to be rather clever or they never would marry, and there they were, madly in love and grieving themselves sick over the matter.

In spite of my best efforts and the excellent food, the banquet was a rather dismal occasion. I lost no time in showing Harold Dha what I thought of his behavior.

"My very good neighbor," I remarked so all could hear me, "I am deeply puzzled over your conduct. Why, if you wished to visit me and sign a treaty of everlasting friendship, was it necessary for you to bring an army with you?"

"You mistook my motives," he replied. "When I heard that Queen Broda intended to invade Cornwall it seemed only proper for me to come to your aid. I am certain you would do the same if the barbarians from the north invaded Wales."

"That was kindly and diplomatically said," I answered, bowing, "and I hope you will never forget the lessons you have learned on this visit. Now, after you have eaten I will ask you to sign this treaty I have prepared and then leave, taking a copy with you so you may refer to it in the future when your memory of these times fails you. It would be best for you to lead your army back to Wales, starting this very night. Both Cornish and Irish warriors will accompany you so your men will not lose their way in the dark forest. And now hail and farewell and get you gone, for I have very important duties to attend which do not require your presence."

After the banquet the three of us gathered in a dismal cell far down under the castle. It was a very unpleasant place, but it was very suitable for the terrific magic I contemplated. I had sent down some rattling chains, a brazier of charcoal and some incense which threw off a nauseating odor. I had a hound-dog tied in one corner and seven rats in a wire cage hanging from the wall. It all looked horrible enough, and even my blood chilled when the hound howled, which he did every time I looked up at the rats. I had a stool for the lady to sit upon but Fitz-Hugh and I stood. I began with the Lord's Prayer in Latin, said backward, a trick I had learned in my boyhood. Then I threw a dead mouse on the burning coals, closed my eyes and just muttered. Suddenly, with a howl that startled them all, even the dog, I jumped on poor Fitz-Hugh and began to wrestle with him. Finally I shook him loose from me and had his tail in my hand. After showing it to the Queen, I with shaking hand threw it on the charcoal, and as it burned it gave off a mighty offensive smell.

There was no doubt left in the mind of Queen Broda. The man of Cornwall had had a tail; by my magic I had taken the tail from him; now that he no longer had the tail she could marry him. She did not waste a moment but took the lad in her arms. She kissed him; he kissed her. I marveled that any two persons could spend so much energy in such osculations. Rather tired and slightly embarrassed at being a spectator to such amorous time-passing, I suggested that we return to the library.

There the priest waited for us. The young people talked matters over and arranged for their future. The Queen said she would never forget my kindness and that I need nevermore worry about the men of Wales. FitzHugh promised he would send me a golden chain to hold the Key to Cornwall, also some books he had which I would enjoy reading. So everything was lovely and that very night they were married by my priestly friend.

The next morning when they departed I went down the road a piece with them. Of course Lord FitzHugh was riding with his bride in her golden chariot. She was silent, but her sparkling eyes and dimpled cheeks did a lot of talking. Finally he stepped out of the chariot and came over to my horse to say good-bye.

"Cecil, Overlord of Cornwall and my very kind friend," he said earnestly, "how did you know I did not have a tail?"

"That was not hard to find out," I replied, laughing. "When I had the opportunity, I asked your mother."

We looked over at the beautiful bride.

Queen Broda sat silent in her golden chariot. She was smiling happily.



Tales From Cornwall

by David H. Keller, M. D.

(author of *The Abyss*, *Heredity*, etc.)

NO. 7 NO OTHER MAN

While this is the seventh in the over-all series of Tales From Cornwall, it is the third of five dealing with Cecil, Overlord of Cornwall. It followed *The Battle of the Toads* and *The Tailed Man of Cornwall* in rapid succession in *WEIRD TALES*, in 1929; then nearly a year passed before we saw the next story; the fifth has never been published. DAVID H. KELLER, M.D. (1880-1966) already had a substantial reputation among lovers of fantasy, science fiction, and weird tales before September 1929, when the first of his Cornwall stories to be published appeared. Followers of *WEIRD TALES* had seen memorable short-short stories, such as *The Dogs of Salem*, and *The Jelly Fish*; lovers of science fiction had seen *The Revolt of the Pedestrians*, *The Menace* (where Taine of San Francisco made his first appearance in print), and *The Psychophonic Nurse*; and the powerful (albeit implausible) *The Human Termites* was running simultaneously in the October issue of *SCIENCE WONDER STORIES*. Needless to say, the Cecil sequence was unlike anything that had been seen from Dr. Keller's hands before, and the readers' requests for more were loud and persistent.

Copyright 1929 by The Popular Fiction Publishing Company for
WEIRD TALES December; by permission of Celia Keller.

ARGUMENT WITH DATES

200 B. C. - Folkes-King Eric rules in Wearfold, Norway. Olaf is Lord of the House of the Wolves in Jutland.

190 B. C. - Balder, son of Olaf, is born.

189 B. C. - Thyra, daughter of Eric, is born.

171 B. C. - Balder adventures to Wearfold, kills a giant and marries Thyra.

170 B. C. - Holga, oldest son of Balder, is born.

140 B. C. - Odin, only son of Holga, is born.

100 B. C. - The Wolves are driven from Jutland by the Norsemen. Balder is transmuted into an oak tree. Under the command of Lord Holga the Wolves sail southwest and find a new home in Arnnorica.

99 B. C. - Harold, son of Odin, is born.

77 B. C. - Edward, son of Harold, is born.

58 B. C. - Edward adventures to the east and marries an eagle. She lays an egg, hatches a boy, changes to a woman and calls her son Cecil.

57 B. C. - Caesar invades Gaul. The Wolves flee to Cornwall. Lord Harold dies and his son Edward becomes Lord. The family name is changed to Hubelaire.

43 A. D. - Claudius conquers most of England and builds the Hadrian Wall.

350 A. D. - The Romans are driven from England.

400 A. D. - The Hubelaires are never conquered, but repeated sieges of their castle, destruction of their lands and frequent pestilences so weaken them that they leave Cornwall and sail to the Isle of Lundy in the Hungry Sea. Here they build a walled town and live at peace for thirty years.

430 A. D. - The Rathlings invade Lundy and attack the Hubelaires. After long fighting with heavy losses on both sides, peace is declared; but the Rathlings remain in Lundy.

440 A. D. - The Rathlings break the peace and kill all the Hubelaires; but Raymond the Golden, before his death, becomes the father of two sons, Raymond and Doom.

462 A. D. - Raymond and Doom destroy the Rathlings and then sail to Arnnorica, where they establish the little kingdom of Walling.

782 A. D. - Cecil is Lord of the Hubelaires in Walling. His only daughter, Angelica, dies, after destroying a giant.

783 A. D. - Cecil, nephew of Lord Cecil, adventures to Cornwall and becomes the Overlord of that country. He lives in the castle of the Hubelaires, first occupied by his family in 57 B. C. He helps Lord FitzHugh marry Queen Broda of Ireland.

EVER SINCE I SLEW the dragon of Thorp's Woods, the people of Cornwall thought all they need do in time of trouble was to come to me. For a while I tried to be considerate, thinking it was part of my duties as Overlord of Cornwall to kill serpents, hang robbers, destroy giants and, in every way, make the country a pleasant and safe place to live in. Unfortunately

these high ideals left little leisure to devote to my reading and the writing of my autobiography. Often I was no sooner back from one adventure, comfortably clad in velvets and starting to write my book, than a fresh emergency made it necessary to don my armor once again and sally forth to punish more brigands or sever the head of another slithering snake. In winter the harness and armor were so cold that only after some hours of riding did my gooseflesh subside and enable me to ride my charger with any comfort.

Finally, for some weeks, everything was quiet in Cornwall. If any dragons remained, they thought it best to hide in their secret caves. All the robbers had fled to Wales or Armorica.

The slain giants were rotting in their gore. As far as my sway extended, all was peaceful, and I felt I had earned a period of relaxation. Though it was early spring, it was still cold and the roads were deep in mire. My stallion was comfortable, kneedeep in straw and munching the best grain my peasants could raise. I had large logs in the fireplace, new cushions to sit on, a woolen shawl for my knees and another for my shoulders, and wine on the table. I kept writing the history of my life, which was rapidly being filled with weird and unusual adventures. Why should I worry about wrongs done in Wales or the lands of the Irish and Scots?

Then, after three weeks of comfort, two old folks came, bringing with them a long parchment, bearing the signature of Cadwyn, King of Wales. I had heard rumors that Harold had been poisoned but had paid them no heed since the Welsh were given to changing their kings, in one way or another, every few months. But the parchment with signature and seal had so impressed my seneschal that he had admitted the old man and woman bearing the parchment and even brought them to the door of the library. When I tossed the paper to one side, refused to see them, and ordered them fed and removed from the castle, they raised such a lamentation that I ordered them fed at once, after which I promised to listen to their story.

They were cold and wet, so I placed them by the fire and requested them for the sake of good Saint Jerome, to fill up and

get warm. Thus I gained an extra half-hour to write in my book and when I saw this much time had slipped down the narrow channel of the sand-glass, during which period I had written two pages, I was very much cheered and almost tempted to be civil to my plebeian visitors.

The story they told was a familiar one. Their daughter had been stolen and they believed she was being held a prisoner in one of the mountain caves a dozen miles from their hut. What manner of man or beast had done this foul deed they knew not; there were strange tales about the horrific fiends who inhabited that particular mountain. They had been to see their king and he had asked his knights to rescue the maiden, but one and all refused to undertake the adventure. The king decided to tell me about the wrong done to these ancients and ask me to right it. As they became more excited, they raised their hands and cried that never was there such a lovely maiden as their daughter or one so pure, and why had the Saints permitted this terrible thing to happen to her?

Naturally I was sorry for them, but I was irritated, for it seemed to me that I was being imposed upon and that the knights of Wales ought to attend to their own giants and dragons; so, when they finally came to the end of their tale, I gruffly said: "Why come to me with your troubles? Any brave man can find your daughter and there must be many a valiant knight in your own land."

At that they cried out that I was wrong, and the woman said over and over again, "No other man! No other man! No other man!" — which was all stupid nonsense, both foolish and far from the truth.

However, it all ended in my telling them to go to bed and sleep and promising that on the morrow I would return with them and see what could be done concerning the rescue of their daughter, though I doubted that she was still alive. Sending them off to a good night's rest, I ordered fresh logs put on the fire and some spiced beer warmed for my comfort and then started to read the adventures of a good knight named Hercules, who was either a better fighter or a better liar than I could ever hope to be.

Finally, I sought the warmth of my featherbed and, disturbed in mind, waited for what the morrow might bring.

The next day, in a drizzle of rain, we started for some town in Wales, the proper sounding of whose name I never did learn. The old dame and her man rode slowly ahead on two sorry pads, while I rode behind them on my favorite stallion.

The woolens and leather I wore under my armor had been well warmed and greased ere I donned them, but the day was chill and in no time at all I became depressed by the cold of my armor. I tried to pass the time reciting Latin verbs, which made the old folks shiver and cross themselves, for they thought my mutterings to be imprecations and incantations against the power of the Evil One. Now and then my stallion reared in the air and neighed, perhaps for his warm stall and hearty meals of grain, or perhaps for some other reason, but I promptly forced him down to earth on all fours.

So we rode for the space of five days. At night we slept where we could and by day we rode and suffered from the cold rains. I had gold with me and could pay for the best, but even the best was sorry worst, and ever and again I sighed for my velvets, fire, good beer and fascinating manuscripts. Even the memory of *Elephantis* failed to keep me warm. Yet an end finally came and we arrived at the hut of the old man and his wife. It was still raining and the sky was lowering; yet, through the gloom, I could see the dark mountains far in the distance, covered with mighty trees and holding in their mysterious fastnesses the lovely daughter and the unknown monster who had torn her from her parental home.

The news of our arrival spread through the little town and all the simple folk flocked to see the giant-killer, and whether they were disappointed by my looks, I wot not; at least they made no unfavorable comments. However, since I had come all this long five-days' journey to accomplish another wonderful feat of chivalry, I was pleased to talk to these humble folks, for I wished to learn all there was to be known about the land, and the special variety of monsters it harbored, and just how this maiden had

been taken, and what manner of fiend had done the deed, for I had found such preliminary investigation to be of the greatest value in winning victory over the Powers of Darkness. Also I was glad to have some of the kindly peasants carefully dry and oil my armor and rub over my muscles a special, sacred oil brought from the Holy Land, being from the body of a great saint who had been boiled alive; this oil was very comforting in both a physical and a religious sense.

All of the men told a different tale about the monster. None had actually seen it, but all agreed it was a twenty-ell serpent, had the shape of a great unicorn, a headless man with eyes in his belly, a bull with the head of a man, a real dragon who had wandered to Wales from Tartary or a three-headed giant. All stated that it was very horrible and could easily kill, simply by blowing a flame of fire on the unfortunate victim's face. The usual weapons were powerless. Steel could not cut, lance could not pierce, mace could not crush. The more they talked, the more peculiar I felt and the more clearly I saw why the knights of Wales were too busy to take any part in the rescue of this maiden, irrespective of her beauty and the customary reward. It was really a very awkward situation.

They all seemed very happy over my arrival and said again and again that if human man could kill this monster, the giant-killer from Cornwall could. I assured them that I was confident I could find the maiden and rid their land of this foul animal, be it man, beast, or demon. At that, a very old man knelt before me and with humble thanks said that he would give me fifty gold crowns if I did so, as he was betrothed to the maiden, having purchased her from her father and that the wedding would have been consummated ere now had the fiend from the mountain not taken her.

I looked at the old man, his withered face, shrunken frame and scanty white hair. The more I saw of him the less I liked him, and I thought to myself that perhaps the maiden was better off in the mountains than in his house. In fact, I suddenly grew sick of the entire adventure and demanded that I be escorted to my room and left to sleep till the morrow. They did as I commanded, and I

spent a restless night tossing on a couch of corn shucks, sorely missing my warm featherbed.

The next morning all the townspeople gathered to see me put on my armor, and after that had been done I drank a quart of beer—moodily, for it was poor stuff. Then, sad of heart, I mounted my horse and rode toward the mountain. A priest strode ahead of me, singing a prayer; the old man and woman walked on either side of my horse, while the old lover hobbled behind me, urging me to guard myself well and saying repeatedly that he surely would give me the promised fifty crowns.

The old woman kept muttering, "No other man would do it. *No other man.*"

"Would be such a fool," I added in a whisper. "No other man. Many of the men I have read of, such as Launcelot, Bevin, or Ulysses would have been glad to adventure thus; but only I, who have cleared my own country of such monsters, would be fool enough to do such dirty work for the cowardly men of Wales."

The old husband, the priest and the senile lover took up the chant, "No other man would do it. No other man!" Finally we came to the edge of the wood and within a mile of the mountain, where they paused, saying they dare not go further with me, but would return home and wait, praying for my safe return.

The trees were so close together that I could not ride my charger, so I dismounted, tied him to a tree and then looked into the woods. It was dark and feyish, yet through the trees came glittering, glistening shafts of golden sunshine, and far away, I heard a thrush sing and a squirrel chatter in the treetops. Then I knew that I was in the Enchanted Forest, for here was springtime and pleasant weather. It being warm, I took a new view of the situation and I decided that I could not fight well with all my armor on; so, back to the horse and there I made myself comfortable, and, when I next wended into the woods, I was clothed in woolens only. My great sword was over my back, my shield was on one arm, a dagger in my belt and a lovely woods-flower in my right hand.

Thus, on to the rocks, and, nearing them, I heard the sound of

singing, and the song was about love and roses and ladies' tresses. I marveled at this and knew it was weird legerdemain. Further on I wandered, and suddenly I came upon the singer, whereat I was greatly frightened. For I knew now that I was in the midst of a great mystery and a most powerful magic. This evil beast who had stolen the poor girl from her parents, by his cunning and in preparation for my arrival, changed his ugly body into that of a lovely damsel, and was waiting to deceive me and, when I was unaware, to kill me with his poison and his mighty power.

I knew that it was useless to cut such a being with a sword or pierce it with a dagger, his body being so much thin air. In such a conflict, weapons of ordinary use were powerless. So I slowly discarded my shield, sword and dagger and, holding the woods-flower in my outstretched hand, I closed for the conflict.

"Though you are a mystic magician," I cried, "I command you to give me the poor little girl you stole from her parents on Ash Wednesday. Give her to me, and if she is safe I will not harm you; but if you persist, I will match my magic against yours and overcome you."

"Who are you?" demanded the demon. "Why are you here?"

I could tell from the way he questioned me that he was much impressed by my threat.

"I am Cecil Hubelaire, son of James, and grandson of David, and Raymond the Golden was my distant ancestor. Latterly I have become Overlord of Cornwall. You may be interested to know that I killed the dragon of Thorp's Woods and destroyed seven slithering, shimmering snakes in Ireland which Saint Patrick failed to kill, so that I finished the task he began. Alone and unaided, I made an ending of five Moors who threatened the reputation of a fair Spanish lady, after which she rewarded me in a manner that was most pleasing to each of us. In my land of Conwall I caught twenty-three bandits, and hanged them as a warning to all evildoers."

I paused to watch the effect of all this. There was no doubt that the fiend was considerably disturbed, so I continued. "In this country a poor girl—who, by the way, was to marry a very rich man—was ravished from her parents. They appealed to the

King of Wales and he pleaded with his knights to rescue her, but all refused, claiming they were too busy. The king sent a very urgent letter to me, and for five days I rode over the worst possible roads to perform this great adventure. It would be better if you submit quietly and allow me to restore the maiden to her parents and future husband. If you refuse, I shall needs fight and will surely overcome you, irrespective of what shape you may assume."

At this the monster started to cry. "I will never go back and marry that miserable old man. It would be better for me to die!" It was easily apparent that this was only part of the deception the horrific monster was trying to impose upon me; so I grew stern.

"She must go back," I cried harshly, and, twirling the woods-flower in my hand to distract his attention, I advanced on him, for it was my purpose to spring forward suddenly, take him by the throat and choke him to death before he had a chance to change his form from that of a beautiful woman to his usual dragon shape or that of a six-legged scorpion.

The monster looked at me. The eyes he had assumed were blue, the face fair and smooth as a rose petal, and his mouth was a lovely red bow. It was easily seen that the body he had taken as disguise was fair, for the silken robe clung seductively to curves worthy of Aphrodite. Suddenly he cried out loudly. "No other man," he sobbed, "would make me go back and marry that horrible old lecher!" But by that time I leaped forward and was crushing him in my arms.

Some days later I came out of the dark forest. My poor charger, having eaten all the grass within his reach, had broken loose but, true to his master, had remained near the armor. Slowly I put on the heavy pieces and, mounted the faithful animal, prepared to return to the town. So I rode away from the mountain—with the damsel in front of me.

To my surprise I was met by a great concourse of armed men. It seems that King Cadwyn, hearing that I had gone into the mountains on a desperate adventure, had gathered his knights

and come to my rescue. Had I not presented myself that day, they would have searched for my bones to give them Christian burial. My sudden appearance made such a search unnecessary; so there was nothing to do but make merry over my safe return from so great a derring-do and allow feasting to replace the proposed solemn masses for my soul.

At the banquet table I requested that the damsel sit beside me, saying that there were very impressive reasons why this should be so. Then came feasting and talking, the Welsh being very brave at both such sports. King Cadwyn told how proud they all were to have the Overlord of Cornwall take part in such a glorious and valorous undertaking; the girl's father stammered his joy and thanksgiving for her safe return; the aged gallant handed me a silken bag holding the fifty crowns he had promised me as a reward. Then he begged the monarch that the wedding take place while all the nobility of Wales were there, and promised to give fine presents to each guest.

But I rose from my seat and said, "I cannot let this man die!" "What do you mean?" asked the King.

"To explain," I replied, "will be a pleasure, though I cannot do so without telling of my overcoming this great Welsh monster in his mountain cave. If, in the telling, at times I seem boastful, you will pardon my pride; for, in truth, the feat was a great deed and well done. I do not wish to relate all the details, for they, in part, are so terrible that the women, listening, would swoon from fright. I will simply explain why it is impossible for this worthy man to marry the damsel, because he is a good man and I do not want him to die.

"When I entered the dark woods I heard a horrible hissing and knew by the terrifying sound that the monster was trying to frighten me. Leaving my horse, I advanced cautiously. As the woods grew darker, I saw flashes of lightning and knew that the eyes of the dragon emitted these flames. Finally I was near enough to see the creature, and you may judge of my amazement when I tell you that it was a worm, many ells long, but instead of feet like a millipede it had arms and hands, and each hand grasped a weapon, sharp as a dagger and poisoned with deadly

dragon's doom. He had three heads, and I may remark here that a three-headed monster is not new to me, I having killed several of them in Gorkiland; but only one head of this monster had a face; the other two being smooth of features, save for mouths that dripped blood and spittal. It showed no signs of fear but rushed at me, and for over an hour I had need of all my skill in defending myself from its weapons. I used, as is my wont in such battles, my two-handed sword and finally succeeded in cutting off one of the heads. The monster howled dismally and ran into its cave.

"I rushed after it and was not surprised to find that its home was a large cavern well lighted by the baleful glare from the monster's eyes. The headless stump oozed a white blood which shone on the floor of the cave. The fighting was now most terrible and difficult, because I was constantly stumbling over the bones of maidens he had previously ravaged and devoured. After a long and bitter struggle I snipped off another head, and now the monster retreated into a smaller cave. Chained to the wall of this cavern was the poor little girl who had been stolen from her parents and would have been destroyed, body and soul, at the next full moon, had I not come when, in desperation, your brave King sent for me.

"The dragon now assumed the shape of an old magician and, breathing harshly, asked me to leave in peace, offering to share the beauty of the maiden with me if I did as he requested. Naturally, I scorned such a dastardly suggestion and, calling on him to defend himself, rushed on him with dagger in hand. Seeing that he was doomed by the power of my magic, he metamorphosed himself into a bubble of air and vanished down the maiden's throat.

"I have brought her back, but the monster is still within her, waiting for a chance to issue forth and destroy all you good people of Wales. If she marries this man, the monster will sally forth on the bridal night and tear the poor bridegroom to pieces. If she remains here, the whole village is in danger. The world is safe only as long as the demon realizes that I am close at hand to strangle him at his first appearance."

The audience shivered and seemed stunned by my tale.

"What are your plans?" the king asked, pale and shaken. "And why should you undergo such a risk to save the life of one man or all the simple folk of this village?"

"I propose to take this unfortunate damsel with me to Cornwall. During the journey I shall watch her closely. If the monster comes out of her, I will at once kill him and return her to her parents and her betrothed. If the fiend still sulks in her midgut by the time I reach Cornwall, I shall give her rare medicine I know of and thus, gradually, the fiend will die. I am a lone man, without wife or children, and it is better for me to take this great risk than to have all these good people die in one night of slaughter, horrible even to imagine. I know a lot about such demons and their course of action, and thus it is better for me to keep the damsel near me till he is utterly destroyed."

"Oh, kind sir!" cried the mother. "How can we thank you? You are too good to us. No other man would have done all these wondrous things just for strangers. I will feel so safe with my daughter in your care!"

And the aged one came to me on his knees and humbly handed me a gold chain and thanked me for saving him from a horrible tearing at the hands of this deformed beast from Hell.

It was now late in the afternoon, yet, as the day was warm, I insisted that I depart at once for Cornwall; so I mounted my charger with the damsel pillioned before me. Tied to the back of my saddle was a bundle of presents—jewels and fine silken goods—from the king and his knights. I wore all my armor save my helmet, which I had tied to the saddle, and in its place I wore a little velvet cap.

We said kind farewells to all of these Welsh people.

King Cadwyn rode down the narrow path beside me.

"Art sure, dear sibling," he asked, as he turned to leave me, "art sure the damsel hath a devil in her?"

"Certainly," I replied very seriously.

"Then she be a true woman," he answered, "for all women I have ever known are thus inhabited."

With this he winked at me, and trotted back to where his knights awaited him.

Ruth and I fared on through the summer afternoon. More and more, as the sun lowered in the kindly sky, she leaned heavily against me; and now and then she sighed as she looked at me with those deep blue eyes and asked, "Dost see aught of the monster peering from my mouth?"

"Nay," I replied, holding her closer so that she be not frightened.

"Yet I fear me that it cometh out. Drive it back, my heart!" and so I did with kisses.

How stubborn that devil was! How hard to drive back!

Finally she gasped. "No other man," she whispered, "would have done it as you did."

"No other man!" I echoed.

And once again I drove the devil back from her mouth.

The Reckoning

Only one story gave any competition to the winner this time (No. 29, September), and that was the fourth of the series of Tales From Cornwall. While a few do not care for these stories, or, though liking them, do not feel that they belong in MOH, more than 80% of you, the active readers, are loud in favor of them. Here is how your votes rated the issue.

(1) *Guatemozin the Visitant*, Arthur J. Burks; (2) *The Case of the Sinister Shape*, Gordon MacCreagh; (3) *The Thirry and One*, David H. Keller, M.D.; (4) *Portraits by Jacob Pitt*, Steven Lott; (5) *The Red Sail*, Charles Hilan Craig.

Here's an oddity: Although the MacCreagh story was never in first place, and Dr. Keller pulled out in front of the winner several times during the race, the Dr. Muncing tale finally nosed ahead of the Cornwall story to clinch second place.

TALES FROM CORNWALL

by David H. Keller, M.D.

(author of *The Abyss*, *Heredity*, etc.)

No. 8 *The Bride Well*

As Paul Spencer pointed out in our last issue, DAVID H. KELLER was a staunch admirer of the works of James Branch Cabell, and while there is a touch of Cabell in all of the *Tales From Cornwall*, it comes out most clearly in the Cecil, Overlord sequences, of which this is the fourth.

IT WAS NOT TILL we had arrived within the boundaries of my beloved Cornwall that I realized my appearing before my subjects with a Welsh lady might not be either understood or accepted by those sturdy knights who had been so faithful during the early months of my reign. It was all well enough to rescue the so lovely Ruth and even spend long minutes driving the devil back into her body with long, lingering kisses; but to brazenly bring the same lady back to my domains might cause political disturbances of a direst nature. Yet, at the same time, there was

Ruth, on the horse in front of me; and, from certain clinging habits she had spontaneously developed, I had every reason to believe she intended to remain within the curve of my left arm, waist-bound, for the rest of her life.

"I am Overlord of Cornwall," at last I made bold to say, "and much of my support comes from nobles with marriageable daughters. As long as I remain a bachelor, these nobles will remain my friends, but if they saw you and found you were from Wales, jealous dissensions would at once arise. So we shall stop at the next chapman's and buy masculine apparel for you, and you can go to my castle as a page."

"Shall I be your page," Ruth asked.

"Oh, I presume so. At least I will have no other, and you can run my errands for me, and bind on my armor when I go giant-hunting."

"That will be nice. I think I shall look well in boy's clothes. I used to wear them when I was much younger. Will you give me a boy's name?"

We talked it over and decided to call her Percy. Later in the day we met an itinerant who was selling clothing to those who could buy, and I made a shrewd trade with him, so when Ruth came from behind the bushes she looked like a young lad, not yet shaven. The peddler took her clothes and some silver and left us.

After that I made Ruth ride behind me, and, if there was any holding to do, she could do it. All that day and one more day we rode, and at night we arrived at my castle. Giving orders that my faithful charger be well fed and bedded, and that the treasures I brought with me be safely secured behind lock and bar, I trudged wearily to my rooms to remove the iron and leather harness that seemed so necessary for a ruler to wear when out on the lonely roads of his country. I bethought me of King Arthur, who made his land so safe that a golden bracelet hung on a thorn bush for three years without being disturbed while it waited for its rightful owner. That was the kind of country I wanted Cornwall to be, some day.

Percy came after me into the privacy of my rooms, and ere I was aware, started to take off my armor and cleverly found sweet oil to rub me with and then helped me put on my silks and soft velvets. Before I realized it, I was in comfort before the fire, and she holding out to me a horn of spiced ale, which it seems she had ordered for my pleasure on her way up the stone stairs.

After that came some pleasant days in the library. Ruth could not read, but she had a willingness to learn. Her frank statement that I knew more than she did was decidedly refreshing to my masculine pride. In my astonishing adventures in the Apurimac Valley, the Blessed Islands, Cabel and Dehomey, I had met many women, but never one who willingly acknowledged my intellectual supremacy. The simple child seemed anxious to learn, so I permitted her to look through my books and I read to her some pages of my personal history, and after many hours I was pleased to find that she had learned to read, though still showing a preference for picture books. Of course she wore her boy's clothing and I was very careful to call her Percy, but occasionally, when we were alone, I graciously gave her osculatory treatment for the devil I had forced to enter her.

It was all very lovely and might have continued for an eternity of pleasant evenings, at least for several months, had it not been for an unexpected and slightly embarrassing visit from several of my mightiest nobles. There were only three of them, but they were so powerful in the affairs of Cornwall that they might as well have been thirty or three hundred. I received them in the library, first telling Percy to begone and stay begone till she knew they were safely out of the castle. To help the page pass the time while away from me, I gave her a book wherefrom she could learn her letters and thus improve her ability to read.

Before the fire the good knights, Belvidere, Arthur and Mallory, sat warming their shins and drinking my wine, the while looking at each other and then sidewise at me as though uncertain as to who should begin the conversation or as to the

effect it would have on their Overlord. At last Mallory coughed and began to tell me what was on their minds.

"You must be willing to acknowledge, Cecil, son of James and grandson of David, and even back to the son of Raymond, that your arrival in our country and becoming Overlord has been a matter of deep mystery to us all."

"There is no doubt that it was most unusual," I replied.

"We admit that we needed a strong man as ruler. There were robbers, giants and demons within the realm and many strong and jealous countries around us, anxious for our downfall. You arrived at an opportune time, and thanks to your ability as a giant-killer and politician you have given Cornwall a sense of security that, before your advent, it strangely lacked."

"My record speaks for itself," I almost boasted. "Five robber gangs dispersed and from these over a hundred killed in battle or hung to dead limbs to warn all evil-doers against acting thus in my confines. Three giants, seven deadly serpents, one dragon and a number of salamanders and ogres have been sent to Limbo. Thanks to my magical powers, Queen Broda, of Ireland married our Lord Figzhugh and now that country is very friendly to us. Wales does not dare to attack us. In fact, only a short time ago, I adventured there and rid their land of a most horrific curse, following which remarkable feat of valorous knighthood King Conwyn gave me many jewels and other presents of great value. I am going to sell some of these, buy food and give it to my folk against the cold of next winter. Thus there is no doubt, at least in my mind, that Cornwall hath profited by my taking charge of the affairs of state."

Belvidere swore a mighty oath: "By the bones of the eleven thousand and one virgins of Cologne, no one can dispute the truth of all you say, and, speaking for us three, and we represent the country, I am sure that we value your services as Overlord, though your bookish ways are beyond us—."

"Ah" I interrupted, "but you have not seen all my books. Now I am sure that if you looked through my copy of *Elephantis*—Where is my copy? I always keep it right here. That

dog of a page must have taken it. Anyway, I am certain you would have keen enjoyment from its inspection."

"That may be, but we are not monks. None of us understands the art of reading."

"You do not have to read. The book of *Elephantis* is one of pictures only."

"That would be different. But to go on where your Worship broke into my argument. We like you and appreciate your clever manner of ruling the country; but what would happen to us should you die of the Black Plague? You have, as far as we know, neither kith nor kin, and, being unmarried, no children to make your dynasty secure. That is why we came here. To urge your marriage."

I lost no time in making answer.

"This is no new problem to me, my lords. I know I owe it to my country to marry and beget children, sturdy sons to help carry the burden and beautiful daughters to make fortunate alliances. But how can I marry? I am wise but not wise enough to select a wife from the beautiful virgins of Cornwall. I met Eleanor, daughter of Sir Belvidere and lost my heart to her, but the next day Sir Arthur rode by with his daughter Helen, and I realized that she is blonde, whereas Eleanor is brunette. Then the same week chance led me to the home of Sir Mallory, and his daughter Guinevere graced the banquet table. Tell me, my lords, with three such beauties to choose from, how can a man decide? If I marry Eleanor how can I keep the mystical beauties of the other two charmers from haunting my dreams? Shall I take Helen and offend the fathers of Guinevere and Eleanor? That is why I remain a bachelor. Am I right? Only by remaining single can I keep my beloved knights at peace and those darling girls with at least some degree of hope, for as long as I am single I am the rightful property of any woman artful enough to win me."

Sir Arthur smiled: "Very clever. That speech is on a par with your general performance since dropping into our country from nowhere. We know how you feel. You want to be fair with all of us; but at the same time you must marry. I hear that you are a worker of magic; that by your daemonical powers you

became Overlord and later secured the friendship of Ireland by removing the tail from our friend FitzHugh so he could marry Queen Broda. We are asking you to use this magic in selecting a bride. To the west of this castle, centering a fairy ring in the dark forest, is a bride well. A single man, looking into that well, sees the face of his future wife. We will gather there, the Cornwall nobles and their eligible daughters. You will look into the well, compare the picture you see there with the lovely damsels, and announce your decision. It is an ancient custom, and, as we know you are honest, will provide a satisfactory answer to our dilemma. For many hundreds of years our Overlords have thus selected their women. So the next night of the full moon we will gather there and you will provide a priest, and the selection and marriage will be the work of but a few minutes. Are you satisfied with the plan?"

"It is perfect," I replied. "It has all of the elements of white magic of the finest sort."

"Then," said Arthur, "Belvidere and I will be riding through the night. I understand Mallory will remain. He hath a shrew for wife, and the poor lad lets no opportunity slip to remain a night away from her, especially when he hath a leman with him." So saying he slapped Sir Mallory on the back and laughed heartily at his discomforture, and he and Sir Belvidere went out into the night.

"'Tis an odd way of selecting a queen," I remarked.

"So it is," agreed the grizzled old knight, "but hath no more gamble to it than any other way. Hundreds of years ago, 'tis said, the nobility gathered to see the selection of the bride, and, when the Overlord looked into the well he saw, instead of a reflection of a woman, a real one named Melusina, daughter of a Armorican fey called Pressina, and she, coming out of the well, demanded she become the Queen, and none could gainsay her right. They married, and, her clothing off, the poor Overlord found she was half woman and half snake. It was a great scandal and created new styles in clothes and pantofles. Many women claimed to be deformed just to be in style."

"Horrible! But how came she in the well?"

"No doubt placed herself there so she could marry the Overlord. Ha, ha! It would be too bad for that old tale to spread over Cornwall just now. A dozen wells would not hold the lovely women who covet you," and the old rogue poked me in my royal ribs as he drank another horn of ale. At last I had him escorted to his room, there to be cared for by his leman.

As soon as he left I called for Percy. I wanted to know where my copy of *Elephantis* was. As I suspected, she had taken it with her when she left the library and all the time I had thought she was studying her letters.

"How can you ever hope to become learned when you spend time looking at such pictures instead of devoting yourself to reading?" I scolded her.

"I do not want to be learned," she sulked.

"What do you want? Have you no desire to improve your condition in life?" I demanded.

Tears were her only answer, so I cuffed her on the ear and bade her begone for the night. It would be one week before the night of the full moon. If I was going to have a wife, then the best place for Percy or Ruth, or whatever his or her name was, would be back in Wales. So the next morning I had a pony packed with silken gowns and jewels and had her placed on an ambling pad in charge of two of my most trusted men-at-arms, and sent her on her way.

"Go back and marry your old miser," I said roughly, "and be an honest woman and the mother of children and cease your nonsense and your odd ways."

"I don't think you want me any more," she said very seriously, and the way she looked at me and pursed her lips made me regret what I had done.

"It is not that," I said in self-defense, "but as the Overlord of a great country I must marry and start a dynasty; so on your way, and occasionally think kindly of me, Ruth."

So off she went back to Wales, and I thought myself well rid of a dangerous situation; for now that I was to marry and settle down, there was only one way for me to live and that was

as an example to my people, a model of faithfulness and sobriety.

I sent for my seneschal. "Have all in readiness for many guests," I commanded.

"That I will do gladly, since I am pleased to know you are to marry, Lord Cecil," he replied. "Already I have men at work preparing a new bedroom for you, with the walls hung with beautiful tapestries appropriate to your new position. Leda and the Swan, and Hercules and the fifty and one maidens. There is an old story which I never could comprehend, and mayhaps my Lord can give me the right of it. Did Knight Hercules love the one maiden fifty times in one night or love the fifty maidens all in one night?"

"If he claimed either he was a liar, and it would be best not to have such pictures in my new bedroom, for my bride might be vexed when she compared me with this braggart from the mysterious East." With that I dismissed him and resumed the writing of my personal history, being anxious to bring it up to date and not certain how much time I would have after my marriage. However, I had written only a few pages when I was interrupted by a visitor, none other than the priest who had married Queen Broda.

"Hail, my dear sib," he said, and there was a twinkle in his eye. "Long since, I promised you power to conquer all who opposed you, but that power will not avail you after your wedding, for then you will be but a grain of wheat caught between the upper and the nether millstones of married life."

"Nonsense," I retorted. "I rule Cornwall and certainly should be able to govern my wife, as I intend to do."

"That is what you think! But you are going to learn a deal about women, and in a short time. I shall watch your future with interest. Since you will need a priest to marry you to this unknown damsel, it would be best for me to remain in the castle as your guest till the festivities are over. How is your history progressing? Doubtless you will add to it your adventures in Cornwall. You were wise in sending that page back to Wales. Now go on with your writing while I enjoy some of your old

manuscripts. You have a most interesting library, which is not to be wondered at, since I made the selection."

The next week was a busy one. I kept open house. All the nobility called, and many of them stayed the night. There were gruff fathers and solicitous mothers and attractive daughters, almost without number. Any bachelor who could not pick a bride from these Cornwall beauties was indeed hard to please. Naturally many efforts were made to influence me—gifts, private interviews, little intrigues of every nature; but I was able to act so wisely that when the night of the full moon came all of their relatives were satisfied that I would act fairly and be influenced only by the most honest comparison between the image in the well and the lady whom this image most resembled.

We waited anxiously while the moon rose full and golden. The priest was there in his sacerdotal robes. I was more and more certain that he was the mightily magician who had conquered in the Battle of the Toads, granted me my three wishes and made me Overlord of Cornwall. He must have read my thoughts, for he winked at me and gave me the sign of the Brethren. This cheered me greatly, for, without knowing why, I felt that he would so influence my choice that nothing but happiness would result therefrom. Sir Belvidere was there and Arthur and other loving fathers, fifty in all. It would be a hard and difficult choice and I was glad that a Master Magician had a hand in the affair.

Of course none approached the well. That right was reserved for me, and I was not to look into its depth until the moon was directly above it. It was a serious, silent gathering, each hoping against hope and each hoping something different. They could not all be right. Only one lovely woman could become bride and Queen.

I trembled a little. That was from the chill night air. At the same time it was not an easy matter, even for a hardened adventurer, to go through with the program. Suppose I should be forced to select Lord Mallory's daughter? I knew his wife, and there was no reason to think that the daughter would be otherwise. Oh, well! If the worst came to the worst, I could go hunting gerrymanders in Ethiopia.

At last the priest, who had assumed the position of master of ceremonies, called for silence and bade me walk straight to the well. The moon was now directly above the ancient hole. Trembling, I looked in, and at once covered my dazzled eyes. Then I took a step backward.

"Did you see an image therein?" asked the priest.

"I did."

"Then from these virgins select the one whose image you saw in the Bride Well."

"I cannot. She resembleth none of these waiting ladies."

My people murmured when they heard this. It was a hard statement I had made and one they could not understand. But I waved my hand regally and demanded silence.

"Here is a magical happening," I cried. "There is no image in the well, but rather a real woman. Priest, bid her come forth and tell her station in life. Have her explain how comes she here."

In seven different languages and five distinct dialects he called down the well, commanding the woman to come forth. She came, slowly, as though floating upward she came, stepping gracefully over the stone curbing. Then she made a deep curtsy and in a clear, beautiful voice, she spoke:

"I am Leonora,
Royal daughter
Of most royal parents.
I come from a land most noble,
Among men renowned.
That tract of earth is not
Over mid-earth,
Fellow to many peopled lands,
But is a celestial Paradise,
Beautiful is all that land
With delight blest.
I come from there to Cornwall,
To mate with him who reigns,
And shower love and riches
All over his domain."

Then, stretching her hands toward me, she cried to the priest, "Marry us forthwith, so we may, united, bless this fair land of Cornwall and its beloved people. Why should I care about leaving Paradise, when I can spend an eternity in Cornwall?"

She was regal. From the golden crown which held her glorious locks together down to the silver slippers on her little feet she was a rare mate for any Overlord. Something of this must have impressed my people. Perhaps they felt that it was a happy ending to what might have turned out to be a difficult situation. At least they cried their approval of the marriage.

Then, through the forest, came the sound of silvery horns and the neighing of horses and the dull roll of chariots. Who should it be but Queen Broda in her golden chariot with my friend, her husband, by her side. What magic procedure produced her arrival at this time? When I looked at the priest he winked. Good! With such a partner I would go far.

"Hail, Cecil, Overlord of Cornwall!" she cried. "Hail and thrice hail! I heard you were adventuring into the land of matrimony tonight, and, if the lady by your side is your bride, then your adventurings will be sweet indeed. But you have many damsels here who are unwed. It came to me to select fifty of my young nobles and offer them in marriage to your lovely maidens. With such marriages the friendship of Ireland and Cornwall will truly be made too strong to break."

Then into the moonlight came fifty Irishmen in purple robes and golden armlets and with gold chains around their necks, and they all had yellow hair. The Cornwall maidens could hardly wait till proper introductions were made. Then, by the same magic that had ruled the entire evening, the couples instantly fell in love and understandings were soon reached so that, after an hour of merry-making, there were fifty-one couples to be married by the priest instead of one.

Naturally, everyone went away happy. I entertained as many as I could in my castle, but at last came the hour when I was alone with my bride. She had slipped off her regal robes and draped her lovely body with a silken gown that more than amply proved her statement that she came from Paradise. I determined

to be stern with her. Now was the time to find out who was to rule.

"Why did you do it?" I asked.

"Why should I not? That night when Sir Mallory talked with you I hid behind the velvet curtain. What one woman can do, another can. You gave me the dresses and jewels and I made up my mind to use them. Of course you remember the poem? You read it to me several times and I memorized it, making only the necessary changes."

"Yes," I admitted, "the poem is *De Phoenix*. Of course it was all very ingenious and you looked more beautiful than ever as you rose from the well."

"Of course I had to practice that. It was hard to climb the ladder gracefully, but I would do anything for you, Cecil dear. And it all ended perfectly. Just like one of those stories you used to read to me."

She looked at me so sweetly, she clung to me so tenderly, she looked so adoringly into my eyes, that all my reserve melted. I crushed her to me.

"Oh, Ruth, Ruth! I am so glad it happened this way. No other woman would have had the courage to do it. I am so glad that you are my Queen. I do not believe I shall ever be able to stop kissing you."

We heard a half-smothered laugh. Turning, we faced the priest. "I just dropped in to say good-bye and wish you all kinds of happiness," he said. "You are going far in the world, Cecil, Overlord of Cornwall, with such a woman as wife. By the way, would you mind if I borrowed your copy of *Elephantis*? There is a Cardinal in Italy, a friend of mine, who has expressed the desire to see it."

"That is all right," I answered. "Just take it with you. Now that Ruth and I are married, I do not believe I shall care to spend as much time with *Elephantis* as I did."

"You will find me much nicer," cooed Ruth, as she clung to me.

TALES FROM CORNWALL

by David H. Keller, M.D.

(author of *The Abyss*, *Heredity*, etc.)

No. 9 Feminine Magic

This is the last of the five chapters from the *Tales From Cornwall* in which Cecil, self-styled Overlord, is the principal character. You will see him once more in the next chapter, but near the end of his days, where the tales have taken another turn. The present episode has not been published before.

FOR TWO MONTHS AFTER MY MARRIAGE to the beautiful Leonora we were very happy. Naturally much of the time was spent in entertaining the nobility of Cornwall, all of whom, especially their womenfolk, were more than curious to see their new queen in daylight. Her mysterious appearance had taken place in the soft moonlight and of course there were a hundred versions of exactly what had happened. But all my subjects agreed that her remarkable arrival from the Celestial Paradise which she hight her home was of the same magical nature which had savored all the adventures of their Overlord since first he arrived in Cornwall. As the land was at peace and prosperity reigned, they were content to leave matters as they were.

My bride was very charming. Also she had a regal bearing and a haughty toss of the head which much astonished me, as I well knew her ancestry and former environment. As Ruth, daughter of humble parents, she had been rescued from the dragon and perhaps a worse fate at the hands of her aged lover; as Percy, the page, she had served me humbly and well, satisfied with an occasional word of kindness and a smile. Now this same girl did queen it over my castle and, in fact, over all Cornwall, as though she were to the manor born.

Having taken but scant part in her becoming my wife (the fact being that I had not even been consulted and had known nothing of what was to happen till she came from the Bride Well), I felt that with her it was a case of sink or swim and that she could make her way with good folk of Cornwall as best she might with meager help from me. To my surprise she did this very thing in an excellent manner. I was completely ignored and often left alone in the library while Queen Leonora entertained our guests, listening avidly to their flatteries. All day the castle buzzed with, "Oh, Queen Leonora, what dainty hands you have, enscorrelled with the most beautiful rings!" and "What a lovely complexion!" and, "How fortunate to possess that string of exquisite pearls!" or, "How remarkable that ivory pendant of Cupid and how bravely he carries his bow and arrow!"

For a while I contented myself bringing my history to date; but finally I could no longer endure the strain, so summoned the lady to the library. She gave me a deep curtsy and then lost herself in one of the leather chars, covered, as it happened, with the skin of a black bear, against which ebony her white gown and whiter skin shone like the sun 'gainst a darkening sky.

"I want to talk with you, Madam," I began with scant ceremony. "In some way you became my wife and therefore Queen of Cornwall. As such you have, in a small passage of time, gained a most pleasing popularity. But it grieves and perplexes me to see that you and many of my formerly loyal subjects have almost forgotten my existence. Besides, how came you by that string of wonderful pearls, each worth a king's ransom and larger by far than the pair Cleopatra dissolved for the pleasuring of her

Roman visitors? Of course I know that you say they were my betrothal present, but well enough we know that I never gave them to you."

"The priest who married us gave them to me ere he left," she answered. "I thought you knew him. He told me he was an old friend of yours and had spent a pleasant evening with you in legerdemain. All the ladies admire them greatly. I do not deem it kind of you to scold me, because one of the reasons I married you was to make your position stronger, for all the Cornwall nobles said you must have a wife."

"You did not understand them correctly. A wife was but an incident."

"I am sure I do not comprehend your meaning."

"Naturally not. How could you? I admit that you have a certain beauty and, now that you are married, fill out your gown with admirable curves, but what can you know about affairs of state?"

"I know more that you can imagine. Do you realize that the south of Cornwall is muttering? I heard of it, and, at this time, three of the leaders are in the castle. Give them presents, increase their rank and keep them loyal, or cut off their heads and thus bring an end to their discontent. They await your pleasure, but 'twas your queen who beguiled them here to feel the weight of your hand, either in love or in passion."

This annoyed me, and I could not help but show it.

"You worry me, Leonora!" I cried, "and I wish you would attend to your own affairs and leave the rule of the land to me. You know nothing of politics, and your place is in the women's gallery directing your maidens to spin, weave and make tapestries. Some weeks ago I asked you to have them busy themselves with an embroidery of the Overlord Cecil slaying the three-headed dragon of Wales. I wish it to replace that tapestry of Knight Hercules and his fifty-one damsels. I told the seneschal to remove it, but he had the impudence to tell me that you asked that it remain in your bedchamber. Besides, and this you should consider carefully, your becoming queen was just an accident and if you were not queen some other woman would be; and it was

not a queen my nobles wanted me to have, but a son. So far, you have failed to realize this. I will get me a child, and, it may be, once I have perfected the formula, I will get more. Now that I think of it, there is no time to spare. Have my harness ready and fill my leather purse with gold pieces, for tomorrow I am on my way to Amorica and from there to Cockaigne and all the weird and unattainable places of the earth, including the forbidding desert of Gobi. I will travel far and never rest till I work my magic and have me a son. While I am gone, behave yourself; see that the grapes are gathered in the fall and wine made. Have the larger hogs killed—”

I minded to say more but was given pause by Leonora, who faced me white-heated and unquestionably angry. Her words came so fast that I could gather only a general idea of what she was trying to say. The gist of it was that she did not care how soon I left and the longer I stayed away the better pleased she would be, that she would be delighted if I never came back, for she could rule Cornwall without me and if she had known the kind of a husband I would prove to be she would have rotted in the Bride Well. Then came laughter and tears and, before I was aware, a smart slap on my face, a swishing of silk and I was alone in the library.

Of course, after that, I was bound to go. The sooner I left on my magical search for a son and heir, the sooner I would return and have the boy recognized as the future Overlord of Cornwall. I was confident that the boy and I would have a grand time in the castle and it would be no waiting at all till I would be teaching him to read and to write his letters on parchment.

The next day, all being prepared for my departure, I sent for the seneschal and the captain of my men-at-arms. During my absence they were to hold the border for me and see that the castle and its inmates were protected against any evil ones who came against it. If I was asked for, the seneschal should simply say that I had gone on a very private business to Cockaigne and mayhaps even to Gobi, finally returning to reward the good and punish the evil-doers.

“And while I am gone, Aethelstan,” I said, “you are to be in

full command. In other words you will serve as the vicar of the Overlord. You will even see to it that the Queen only assumes the responsibility of a mere woman. She must have no authority."

"I'll do my best," the old man replied, but it was evident that he was not certain of his ability to carry out my orders.

Very late that afternoon I rode down the road, and the manner of my leaving the castle was in splendid contrast to my incoming when my horse had died and I had been fortunate enough to win the friendship of the mystical man who had won the Battle of the Toads. Though I was fully armed, I now was able to place more confidence in my reputation, which was spread throughout the land, according to my correspondents, as far as the kingdom ruled over by Prester John. Brave man indeed it would be who willingly and knowingly assailed the Overlord who had, single-handed, freed Cornwall from every cursed being which had beforetime so grievously infested her borders.

So I wended my way and that night slept on a thick bed of moss under the shelter of a giant oak. I slept easily and in comfort, free for the first time in many days of the ceaseless chitter-chatter nonsense which so characterized my wife's conversation. I thought it a brave and worthwhile adventure, to go forth into the wide world and, by means of magic, form a son from the shapeless things of the darksome voids. I would be beset on every hand by salamanders, succubi, cocatrices and giant centipedes, and yet, by my power, their strength would be of no avail and finally I would win me back to Cornwall with a lovely boy on the pommel of my saddle. In my drowsiness I smiled, fancying the chit's amazement when I sent her back to Wales.

Early the next day I came to the Irish Sea. Here was a wonder that I could never fathom, how the water came in endless waves and yet there was always water as before and no ceasing of the waves. Seated on stallion I looked over the mighty sea and mused.

"Only this water keeps me from being the greatest monarch of all time; for, if there were no water, Cornwall would include Ireland and go westward from that island till it took India into its domain and even come to the magical land of Gobi. Surely such a

kingdom would give me ample opportunity to prove my greatness."

"Indeed it would," said a soft voice behind me. Turning quickly I saw the priest who had married us, and who had played such an important role when I became Overlord.

"Well, well!" I exclaimed.

"And a third well, Cousin Cecil, and what brings you, a newly married man, to be looking so longingly over the Irish Sea, when you should be at home, in soft and pleasurable dalliance with your lovely bride?"

"We had an argument," I replied. "She failed utterly to comprehend my ambitions in life, and added word on word till she came all in a frenzy. So I left her, for wife or no wife, I know my duty to Cornwall and none may say that Cecil, the Overlord, failed to measure up to any of his responsibilities."

"And what is this great duty?"

"I must have a child. The barons of my country wish the formation of a dynasty. They desire an heir to sit in my stead when I am no longer here but gone West. Now I know a little of magic and know where I can learn more, so I am faring to Cockaigne and may even go as far as Gobi so I can learn the magic of making a son, and then I will return to my native land so that all my subjects may bow to the Prince of Cornwall."

"Fine! Wonderful! A most laudable ambition. Allow me to help you. Ride the rest of today along the coast eastward. Towards evening, just as the mewing sea gulls proudly flaunt their preened feathers in the golden glitter of the setting sun, you will come to a very old castle inhabited by an equally aged man. Tell him who you are and that I sent you and he will be pleased to entertain you. In his most remarkable library you will find every book that has ever been written concerning the magic of child-making. If you wish to have a son you will find in these books a dozen, dozen methods."

"Then I will not have to go to Gobi?" I questioned happily.

"You did not even have to come here," he answered with a gay laugh, and, running down to the surf, dove mightily into the waves and swam toward Ireland. I looked at his footprints in the

sand and saw they were like those of a goat. Here was a magical sign that this man, who certainly had shown his friendship for me on several occasions, was more than human.

That evening, soon before twilight, I arrived at the old castle and was welcomed into the library of the aged owner. Everything had turned out as foretold by the priest. The old man was friendly, though he had a peculiar smile when I informed him concerning the reason for my visit.

"Few come here on such a quest," he commented, "though I admit that my collection of manuscript books is most unusual. You could spend the rest of your life here reading the marvelous lore concerning the thousands of methods of creating children."

"I am astonished that there are so many!"

"It is easy to understand. For centuries learned men have sought to understand the mysterious forces of the spirit-world; none of them thought their lifework complete until they devised a new, startling and perfect method of creating babies in their caves, underground castle rooms where, far away from the disquiet of society, they lived and died.

"I suppose you have read most of them?" I questioned as I looked around the room and saw the hundreds of books.

"Very few of them. In my youth it was not necessary and in old age my eyesight failed."

Satisfied that my stallion was well provided for, I ate a hearty supper and then slept well. The next morning I started to read concerning various methods whereby a man could make him a son. The idea of creating an homunculus pleased me, for it had seemed to me that a child, created by man only, without the contaminating influence of the female sex, must, of necessity, excel in wisdom. No doubt the Good Lord, in his all wisdom, must have had some reason for creating Mother Eve, the first woman, but, in my humble opinion, the world would have been a finer place wherein to live and man much happier had he omitted this final work. As I read on concerning the homunculi I found they were of small size but very intelligent, and I decided not to make one. He might know more than I and that would never do. Also I was certain that a little man, irrespective of his wisdom,

would never be able to do battle as the Overlord of Cornwall if the Welsh invaded my lands.

After some weeks of continued reading it seemed best to make use of interlocking triangles, traced with the tusk of an elephant, and the earth inside the triangles well moistened with the blood of bats. Then the mystic phrase must need be whispered:

"Luro Vopo Vir Voarchadumia."

Following the use of this horrific slogan it would be necessary to wait till the various processes of fixation, deflagration, putrifaction and rubifaction began, matured and arrived at a satisfactory ending. Then, when the star Cantharis came to the meridian, the child would be found in the center of the two triangles, whose points interlocked.

What could be simpler?

All I needed was to obtain the tusk of an elephant and the blood of bats. I asked the ancient if he could help me. He told me that as far as he knew, there had been no elephants in the land for many centuries. He advised me to ride down to the white cliffs of Dover, explaining that there were large horses carved in the stone there and I might find an elephant skeleton. I took his advice but after a two week search found nothing but the bones of a very large bull. So I moodily rode back to the castle by the sea, where the old man met me joyfully, saying that while digging for fishworms in his garden he had found the remains of a very large elephant, had cut a tusk off the skull and had cleaned and sharpened the point. He had also caught some bats and bled them into a red crystal vase.

I thanked him but suggested that the magic might fail unless a young man found the tusk and personally bled the bats. "Methinks," I said, "that since they are used to procreate a child, a young man should secure them, one in the prime of manhood, like myself."

"Since you are creating this child without the aid of a woman, I do not think that age has aught to do with it. All of the manuscripts in my library which tell of such unisexual creations were written by ancient men in their dotage." I thought this was a curious answer but after due consideration, decided he was

right. In addition I also was feeling rather old by this time, not a doddering senile, but certainly far older than when I left my castle some weeks before.

Thereon I searched the castle till I found a small, dry dungeon, poorly lighted by a slotted window and surfaced with a dirt floor. This I smoothed off and, with the point of the tusk, drew the double triangle. Then I scattered the bat's blood within the interlockings and whispered the horrible but evidently necessary words. After that there was nothing to do but wait for Cantharis to be in the proper position in the sky, which the old man had said would be in the space of ten months of twenty-eight days each. What a long time to wait! Of course the books in the library helped me pass the time and, on pleasant days, I went riding to exercise the stallion. I thoroughly enjoyed the library and read parts of every manuscript in it, though more and more I marveled at so many men in the world having children without possessing such methods of creation and not even knowing how to read. One day I praised the old man for his wisdom and his ability to select such wisdom, but he claimed no credit, simply replying that the manuscripts had been collected by a former owner of the castle who had club feet.

But I was worried. I had thrown the dice and risked all on a single toss. As the days passed I lost confidence and cursed myself for not having used a dozen magical methods of procreation at one and the same time. Then surely one would have come to a satisfactory ending. On the other hand, what would I have done if they had all worked favorably and I had a dozen sons, all created at the same time? Which one would have been the future Overlord of Cornwall? As it was now, it was win or lose, defeat or success. No wonder I had sorry dreams in which Leonora mocked me, tempting me with pursed mouth filled with kisses.

Finally the ten months of twenty-eight days each came to an end. All I would have to do was to open the door and pick the little boy from out the interlocked triangles. I tried to remember that I was a brave follower of all great magicians, but my hand shook slightly as I opened the dungeon door and illumined the

dark room with a lighted pine torch. No child on the floor! Only a hissing snake that flicked its forked tongue toward me and sought safety in a rock crack.

Failure! Utter and complete failure! Months on anticipation, tiresome waiting and hard study, with naught but a snake to pay me for my pains! Heartsick, I toiled up the stone steps and staggered to my favorite chair in the library. Waiting for me was the priest, his feet handsomely shod in green leather pantofles.

"Hail, pater familias!" he cried, and his voice boomed musically through the great room.

"You speak wrongly," I replied in sorrow. "All these months I have toiled with the magic that seemed most likely to succeed; instead of a sturdy man-child I made only a little, slithering snake that any farmer boy could go woodward and soon gather at the end of forked stick. Bah! Between you and your books, a year of my young life has been taken from me and I am still childless."

"My dear Cecil," the priest said gravely, as he laid a kind hand on my knee. "I would not harm you in any way. You are thick-headed, and the only way you can learn is by your own experience. Months ago you deliberately left your castle and so sweet bride, being bound and determined to create a child by legerdemain. Had I not advised otherwise, you might have gone to Gobi. Perhaps you were wise in not biding with your wife, for you had to stay somewhere. Women are always hard to live with, but at times they are more difficult to please than usual. You have had your little fling and tried your hand at a most terrible magic. Now that you know your limitations you had better go home and attend to your duties in Cornwall. For I have news of great import for you. Cornwall, deeming you dead, hath selected a new Overlord."

"Surely that cannot be!" I cried, leaping from my chair.

"'Cannot' is a large word to use. Were I you, I would hasten back and see the truth for myself. You were witless to remain away so long."

"Witless I may be!" I howled in rage. "But I can still use my two-handed sword, my battle mace and my ten-foot lance. My

stallion neigheth for the fire and sweat of battle. I will go and fight this impostor in single combat. What part had the Queen in this? Was she loyal to me?"

"I understand she furnished your successor."

"I expected nothing else. Welsh women have that reputation. At least she might have waited longer for my return. Did you give her those pearls she flaunted in my face?"

My angry words must have annoyed him. At least he faded away like so much mist before the sun. I started as I noted the manner of his leaving. It was all too much for me. Tossing several tumblers of ale down my parched throat I threw me on a couch and, shivering, forced myself to sleep.

Three days later I was near enough to my cattle to be cautious. I identified myself to a friendly peasant whom I had befriended in the past. Leaving my horse and armor with him I borrowed some of his old clothes and told him I would send for the stallion and war gear in a few days. It was fortunate I was in disguise, or I would have been easily recognized by the nobility who seemed to be gathering from all parts of Cornwall. On foot as I was, I had to keep on watch for these upstarts on horse and in chariot who were giving scant attention to the common folk. I recognized Queen Broda in her golden chariot, her Irish stallions driven by her husband while she nursed a golden-haired boy. Courtiers trumpeted the coming of the King of Wales bringing presents to the new Overlord. Oh, I could have sliced him with pleasure, and the ink hardly dry on the treaty he had made with me! But I followed the crowd. They acted as though they had come a-Maying, with songs and flowers and chit-chatting talk. It was "Oh, the lovely Queen!" and "Oh, how fortunate we are to have a new Overlord!"

At last we all came to the castle. I watched for a chance and wended me to the library, the windows of which provided a fine view of the courtyard thronged with grand folk from all over our little world. To them came my wife, the deceitful and false Leonora, the woman that I, in love, had once call by the sweet name of Ruth. The crowd huzzahed her, and I could see that she

still held their fancy with her baneful beauty. She seemed sad but yet very determined.

"Men of Cornwall!" she cried regally, and I had to acknowledge to myself that she looked every inch a queen. "Men of Cornwall and friends from Ireland and Wales, greetings! Bravely and well have you been loyal to me during the sad months while my Lord Cecil has been absent from Cornwall. He adventured to Gobi, at the request of the unfortunates of that country, in quest of the most horrible *Centripedius*, a creature so large that our former dragons of Cornwall were but little garden lizards in comparison. Patiently you have waited with me for his return. Now the time has come when we cannot but feel that my Lord hath died, a stranger in a strange land, overcome by a magic he could not conquer. And so I give you my son, baptized Eric the Golden, but now called Cecil Secundus. He, lawful descendant of my dear, dead husband, has every right to become your new Overlord."

At that she took a sturdy youngster from a nurse and held him high above her head. Then cried the multitude their approval, and all seemed happy and gay. Barons came and placed a crown on Leonora's head and made her regent till the boy came of age.

"This will take some explaining," I mused to myself. "Somehow or other I seem to be out of the picture."

Leonora found me in my favorite chair, the one covered with bearskin. "Why, Cecil!" she cried, as she threw herself into my arms. "Where have you been all the time? Why did you stay so long?"

I kissed her many times. Somehow I felt that she expected me to, and I did not want to disappoint her.

"I have been to places you wot not of," I replied gravely, "and you need not think I have been idle. Today I noticed that you held in your arms a sturdy boy. Does that look as though I was idling while away from you? Some day, when the mood strikes me, I will tell you how I worked a magical sending in Gobi, the very telling of which will make the hairs on your head stand out like quills upon the bristling porcupine. Though the danger was great I gladly risked it, for I promised Cornwall a Prince; and

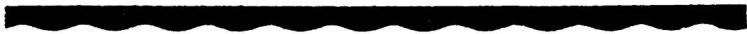
Cecil, Overlord of Cornwall, has never failed to keep a promise. Think you that you, a weak, ignorant woman, could have done all this without the aid of my magical workings in Gobi? I had to stay away till I knew success had crowned my efforts, but I would have arrived sooner had I not paused in Bohemia to rescue a beautiful lady from a terrible death. So do not puff up with too great pride. It was my skill as a magician in the Gobi Desert that gave you the opportunity to present that boy to all of our friends. It was masculine magic, and fearful and wonderful were the things I did and the words I said while far away from you. Now tell me, did you make wine last year?"

"I did, my Lord," she replied meekly. There was no doubt that she was deeply impressed by my narrative.

"Then bring me a brimming horn of it. I want to drink to the long health and happiness of my son, Eric the Golden. Time enough to call him Cecil Secundus when I am dead and he rules in my place."

"I will gladly bring you a brimming horn of wine, Cecil darling, but do not forget, in your more sober moments, that there is such a thing as *feminine magic*." With that she ran out of the room, her silvery laughter following her.

Now what did she mean by that?



TALES FROM CORNWALL

by David H. Keller, M.D.

(author of *The Abyss*, *Heredity*, etc.)

10

THE KEY TO CORNWALL

Although this present tale starts out with Cecil, Overlord of Cornwall, the Cecil series really ended with *Feminine Magic*; the Overlord here makes his farewell and the series takes a different turn. Those who did not care for the whimsy of the Cecil episodes ought to find the present chapter more to their taste; but I trust that those who enjoyed the Cecil tales will appreciate this episode, which is closer to the sort of weird tale one expected from the author.

CECIL, OVERLORD OF CORNWALL, sat dreaming before the fire. Even in his prime, he had never been a large man and now premature age had shrunk him till only his eyes held the fire of youth that had once been his. On the other side of the fire sat his only child, Eric the Golden, who for some years had carried the burdens of Cornwall and thus learned the duties of Overlord against the day when his father should die.

Copyright 1940 by Albion Publications for *STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES*,
February 1941; by permission of Celia Keller.

"Have you ceased writing your history, Father?" asked the young man. "Years past you spent much time in the library; but latterly, when I visited you there, you were often asleep."

"The record of my life does not seem as important now as I once thought it," Cecil replied. "Time was when it seemed necessary to leave a full documentation to the Hubelaires who will follow me. But after the death of your Mother it seemed I lost interest. There are a few blank pages remaining in the volume, which, perhaps, some bookishly minded descendant of mine may fill; but I will write no more. At the back of this book is a chart on parchment showing where Hubelaire treasures are buried in our castle. For one reason or another or for no reason I have never sought them. You should remember they are there and locate the treasures or pass the secret on to your son."

The men were waiting for the wise physician to announce the birth of Eric's child, who in turn, if a son, would some day rule over the land. Cecil had found this country of Cornwall a land of starved simple folk, horrific monsters, still more terrible giants and bands of marauding robbers. His wisdom, more than his strength of arms, had wiped out evil until Cornwall was now a pleasant place to live. On reaching manhood his son, Eric the Golden, had married Black Breda, Princess of Wales. It was an odd marriage, the man a flaxen-haired giant and the woman tiny, black-haired, with great love in her heart and the laughter of pixies in her soul. Now she was in labor, a cause of anxiety to her husband and father-in-law.

The Overlord stroked the golden key which hung pendant to a thick silken cord round his neck, and looked lovingly at his son.

"I am uneasy about this matter of Breda and her child," he said. "Long years ago I came to this land from Armorica and, helped by a mighty magician, won victory over the Toad Men. My friend in this struggle between light and darkness made me Overlord of Cornwall and gave me this key. On it are graven words of a race long dead, so none now can read it, but the meaning of those words is simply this:

They who hold the Golden Key
Shall ever Lords of Cornwall be.

"Thus far the prophecy on the key has been correct. In one way or another I have held the land for you and for those who will come after you. We are at peace with those around us. For many years we have held our borders against those who live by the sword. Our nobles rule wisely and our common folk are content. All have clothes on their backs, fire in their huts and meat in their kettles.

"But last night I had a dream. Mayhaps it was only a false foreboding

of evil, caused by my over-anxiety concerning your lady and her travail, but it seemed to me that at least one of the Toad Men is still alive to do harm to me and mine. My friend with the club feet, who, as priest, married me and your mother Leonora, thought that one was still alive but considered him harmless. Still, it may be that evil never dies. You have heard me speak of this key before, but keep in mind the ancient words. Tell your son about them and have him tell his son. As long as we hold the key, we hold Cornwall; once it is taken from us, our land sinks back to the barbarism in which I found it."

He would have said more, but was interrupted by the old physician, who walked to a place before the fire and stood rubbing his withered hands. At last he turned to Eric and, as though answering a question, said: "Your lady will live, Prince Eric, but she will bear you no more children."

The golden-haired giant sprung toward him and, shaking him roughly by the shoulders, cried: "What of the child? Is it a boy? Will he live?"

Lord Cecil leaned forward, hand gripping the arms of his ivory chair. The physician laughed mockingly. "'Tis a boy and he will live, though when you see him you will think it better had he died. Through him the Brethren of the Toad Men who died untimely that night when Cecil the pauper helped the Devil kill us are revenged."

The Overlord of Cornwall stood up. "Age made me lose my cunning and caution," he muttered grimly. Turning sharply to his son he cried: "Hands off the man, Eric. Nothing must happen to you."

With slow but certain step he moved toward the old physician. For that ancient there was no retreat save into the fire. Then they met, grappled, swayed and fell floorward, the Overlord underneath. The physician had one arm around Cecil's body and one hand on his throat, but Cecil seemed content to have both arms locked behind the other's neck. Eric tore a dagger from his belt and was bending to plunge it into the Toad Man when his wrist was caught in a grip that held him powerless. Turning, he saw a dark stranger who smiled and whispered: "Do not interfere. Your sire is a proud man and I know that he has wisdom to use the only manner by which he can win. He would not want either of us to interfere with his dispensing of justice. He is a true Hubelaire!"

Slowly and surely Cecil brought his face to the face of his adversary; carefully he fastened to him, mouth to mouth, and tightly he held him, sucking the breath of life from his body. The physician twisted above him, strove to rise, to shake off his executioner, but slowly relaxed and at last, with a few tortured jerks, died. And as death came his body changed, almost instantaneously, into that of a giant toad, clad in human garments,

but nonetheless a toad and very dead at that. The stranger separated the living from the dead, threw the toad into the flames and then knelt beside the Overlord of Cornwall.

"I should have come long before, my dear friend," he said, his voice husky with emotion, "but I was busy with serious duties in Tartary and only today did I realize your danger. So I came on the wings of light, barely in time to help you but not in time to save the boy. Now he is as he is and no one can make him different. But his father can hold the key, and after him mayhap, the boy can be made somewhat of. I am not all-wise, but I know there is still one of the race of the Toad Men left. Where that one is or in what shape I know not, but never will the House of Hubelaire be safe till this last one is destroyed. You have been badly hurt; methinks the poison breathed from that spawn of Hell will spell your doom. But all brave men pass sometime and you can be comforted in knowing that you pass bravely. I will escort your spirit to Gobi, where you will spend an eternity as you will, and no doubt that will be in a library."

Thus Cecil, first Overlord of Cornwall, passed and Eric the Golden became custodian of the Golden Key and ruled over the land in his father's stead. Messengers carried the broken bow and the flaming torch throughout the country and by the third day many nobles from near and far came to do the dead man homage. Even the Queen of Ireland drove stately in her golden chariot, and in silver chariots behind her sat three blind harpers who sang new songs in praise of the dead Overlord. But the simple folk sat unconsoled in their huts, wondering what now would happen to them.

It was not till after the funeral-guests had departed and the stranger had returned to Gobi that Eric had time to visit his wife and son. He had asked often about them and was always assured that they were doing well. Now, with the castle empty of visitors he went to the river and bathed till much of his grief and deep sorrow was washed from him in the snow water from the mountains. Then he dressed in his brave court suit and, humming a little song, walked back to the castle and to the room where his wife and child lay.

At the bed of Breda the Black, he dropped to his knees. It was a high bed, but he was a tall man and even with knees to the floor he could overlook his wife. He took her hand in his and knew, without asking, that Death had placed his cross on her forehead. She smiled.

"I am glad to see you, Eric, my first and last love, and it sorrows me that I will not be a long time with you. It seems to me that I am dying

from nothing in particular save the lack of desire to live. My ladies tell me that I am now the Queen of the Overlord and mother of a new prince, but I saw the boy, just for a moment, though my ladies tried to keep me from doing so; and, knowing how you would feel, I have no desire to live. Speed me with your lips and burn candles for the peace of my soul."

Thus Eric the Golden lost two of the dear ones of his life. But he rose bravely from the side of his dead wife, saying in muted voice: "I have a son and must live on for him and his future greatness. Someday he will carry the Golden Key."

He told the ladies-in-waiting to lead him to the child. Fearful, they escorted him to the nursery, where the withered husk of an old nurse sat at the foot of a cradle inlaid with gold, ebony and ivory, a present from the Emperor of the Spice Isles, in which Eric had been rocked years before. The father looked down on his son. The ladies faded from the room. Only the old dame stayed, rubbing her cold fingers.

"The boy has a large head," observed Eric. "He should be wise as a man."

"His head is large and shapely," muttered the nurse.

"There is a good jaw there. When he fastens on an opinion he will hold it. He has a strong neck and will hold his head high as he travels through life."

"His jaw is firm and his neck strong," answered the nurse, though she had no need to.

Eric whirled around, took her by the shoulder and shook her. "What is wrong with the lad?" he demanded. "What is wrong with him?"

She made no reply, but sat with head down, sobbing.

With great, strong, shaking but tender hands, Eric took off the baby clothes and then, white-faced and silent, replaced them and still wordless left the room. In the hall the ladies stood rigid against the walls as though waiting to be struck. He paused, looking from one to one. "Tend to the lad carefully and see that he is fed on Goat's milk," he said. "I go to bury his mother, and when that is done I will come back and provide for my son."

On the morning of the third day he dressed in leather hunting clothes, took the child from the nursery and rode away without escort into the dark forest. The babe slept, but by noon cried lustily for want of food. Just then a woman walked from the greenwood and paused in front of Eric's horse. He, looking down on her, saw that she was young, deep-bosomed, flaxen-haired and in all respects comely.

"Who are you? Why do you stop me? What can I do for you?" he asked kindly.

"I am Freda, wife of Olaf the Dane and mother of his child. Our war vessel, *The Swan*, wrecked on your rocks two suns ago and I was the only one to reach shore. I found a hut and slept. Last night, in a dream, I saw you coming with a babe who hungers for a mother, as I hunger for my dead child."

Wordless, Eric handed her the baby. Wordless, the woman seated herself on the grass, opened her kirtle and nursed the little one. Eric, from his saddle, looked down on them and wondered if here was not a gift of God, sent to aid him in his sore distress. Finally the babe slept. The woman cradled him in her arms and said quietly, "The child has a lovely face."

Eric looked at the woman and babe without answer.

"A strong chin and a powerful neck," she continued. "With proper care he will become a fine man."

"Hand me the little one," commanded the Overlord of Cornwall, "and do you seat yourself behind me on the horse. The boy is yours to care for. I will take you to my hunting lodge, where there will be servants to wait on you and men-at-arms to protect you, for this baby, if he lives, will some day be Lord over all Cornwall. You are a good woman and thus you will have a home and safety. Your care of the child will be rewarded, if a woman can be paid for such kindness to a child."

As time passed Eric found work to busy him. His father had cleaned Cornwall, but now the son put a polish on the land till it was a country anyone would be proud to live in. One day a month he rode to visit his son, and the rest of the time he tried to forget him, which was very difficult. When the boy was three years old Eric called to the castle an old forester who had a flair for training dogs.

"From now on, Russell, you will train a prince instead of wolf-hounds. My son has a strong jaw. He must be taught to use it. He must learn to hang to a rope and never let go until he desires. Teach him how to use his body correctly, to arch his neck and how to move about. Every day rub his body with oil. I will have a wise man teach him in the use of words, and after that in all wisdom. He can learn to write. When he is six we will put him on a pony with special harness and saddle. By the use of a cunningly devised bridle he can learn to guide the pony, and, as he grows older, he will ride a horse. Do you know about the lad?"

"I have heard talk about him but paid little heed of it. It seemed to me that things could not be as bad as 'twas said."

"It is as bad or worse. But the boy has a fine brain and talks very well for his age; so far he does not realize—he has seen no other children—he does not know."

"Someday," said the forester boldly, "he will know, and then he will not thank you for keeping him alive."

"Who am I to kill my own son?" Eric replied. "All of us have something wrong with us, with our minds or bodies. The boy is not to blame—no one is, save the old physician who was slain too late by my father. Let the future tell the story! The lad has a strong jaw and a fine mind. These must carry him where he will go. It is for us to help him make the most of what he has. Do as I told you and remember you have in your keeping the next Overlord of Cornwall."

From that time a new life began for Balder, for thus he was named, that naming having been the desire of Breda the Black while she was carrying him. Eric pondered over the irony of such a name, and thought it should be changed, but wished not to depart from the desires of his dead love. Balder the Beautiful, the beloved, perfect god of the Northlands. What a name for such a child!

The boy learned to hold things in his mouth, death-gripped. He learned to ride the pony, guiding him with his jaw. Freda cared for him. Russell trained his body and a very wise old man taught him wisdom. By the time he was twelve he had learned all the ancient could teach him and could gallop on a war horse. Eric knew the time had come to bring him home to the castle and begin teaching him the duties of Overlord, which he would have to assume some day. His body grew large and strong and he could do what any other fine boy could have done with a similar body—just that and nothing more. But, because he had to depend on it, his mentality had developed far beyond his age.

An artificer in leather made him a harness so he could sit beside his father in the banquet hall. There, except that he had to be fed, he seemed to be like any other young prince, and, as those around him were accustomed to his care and had a great love for him, they never mentioned the tragic difference between him and other young men. He was mostly happy, appearing to enjoy life, as is the due of youth.

On his twenty-first birthday he was sitting in the library reading a manuscript which held him thrilled. A little dark man joined him and asked, "What are you reading, my dear Balder, which seems to make you smile and frown as you turn the pages?"

"This," the young man replied, "is the history of my grandfather,

Cecil, First Overlord of Cornwall. I smile as I read of his very remarkable life and I frown when I realize that there are some unwritten pages at the end of the book, and on them should be placed the tale of his later years."

"You can write. Why not finish the history?"

"What benefits me if I can write, if I know not what happened? All I know is that I am his grandson; how he spent his late years or how he died I know not of, for none has ever told me the story."

"I will tell you about those days," the little man said, "and as I talk you can write the part of my narrative you deem of import. Then we will come to the end of the tale and the finishing of the last page. Your grandsire was one of the great Hubelaires and was my good friend. Now this is what happened—" and he told Balder all concerning the last days of Cecil. As he wrote, Balder thrilled at the tale of the ending of his grandsire. Finally on the bottom of the last page, he wrote "The End" and, looking up to thank the narrator, was astonished to find him gone from the library. He closed the book just as his father entered the room.

"This is your birthday, Balder, and it is time for you to wed," Eric told him. "The times are troublesome, and more and more it becomes difficult for us to keep peace and preserve the land in its Golden Age. Marriage with a princess of a neighboring land, Wales, Scotia or Ireland, would help; and mayhaps your son would rule in peace and security. I think that it could be arranged."

Balder smiled sadly. "It would be better for you to marry again and raise a son," he replied. "Mayhaps some princess, bookish-minded, would marry me for what I have above my neck, but what lovely lady would want me for the part below?"

"You have a strong neck, Balder, a powerful jaw and a fine mind," said the Overlord. "The time may come when such attributes will take a man far in this troubled world. In the future a man may rule by such qualities rather than because he can fight and overcome by brute strength. Your grandsire was not much of a warrior, but he had a clever mind. Had he lived he would have gloried in your knowledge of the books in his library. It would be wise for me to look around and see if a suitable marriage can be arranged for you."

This was not easily accomplished. In all the lands near Cornwall men were still settling disputes with the pole-ax and broadsword. All the kings were kind and sympathetic, and when Eric looked them in the eye, made no reference to the peculiar disability of Prince Balder, but for this and that and the other reason found that a marriage between him and one of their daughters could not be arranged. Then, just as Eric decided that his

undertaking was impossible, messengers came from a land far away, offering the hand of a princess in marriage, a beautiful lady who would bring a dower of great wealth. They brought presents and a picture of the lady, and quietly said that she knew about Prince Balder but that made no difference. Eric sent gifts in return and before the year came to an end the princess arrived and with great pageantry was married to Prince Balder.

That afternoon the Overlord visited his son. "As I told you, these are troubled times," he said. "The King of Wales has sent me messengers saying enemies from the north have come in long ships and are harassing his shores. He pleads for help. Since I am compelled to leave Cornwall, you must rule in my place against my return. So, around your neck, I place this cord of twisted silk from which hangs the Golden Key. Guard it well and remember the ancient verse:

They who hold the Golden Key
Shall ever Lords of Cornwall be.

"When the enemy is driven back, or better still, destroyed, I shall return. Meanwhile, I regret the necessity of leaving you at this time when you should have nothing between you and your bride save thoughts of love-a-daisies."

"Go without fear, Father, and return when the time comes," Balder replied. "And while you are gone nothing shall happen to the Key. My bride, Marylyn, will help me in all things because she seems as wise as she is beautiful."

Thus Eric rode away, followed by his men-at-arms, archers and pike-men, and, after their leaving, the drawbridge was raised. But Freda, the nurse and Russell, the forester were fretted, and talked long into the night about their beloved Prince and his ascent into manhood and the responsibilities so suddenly thrust upon him.

Princess Marylyn went to the bedroom of her husband and, closing the door, locked it while Balder lay on the bed and feasted his eyes on her beauty—but not for long.

"I am puzzled that such a beautiful lady as you could deliberately mate with such a man as I," he said sadly.

"I married you because I wanted to," she replied, laughing.

"But why should you want to?" he asked.

"Because of that key you wear around your neck. Many years ago a Prince of Darkness, aided by your grandsire, destroyed the Toad Men who, for some centuries, had lived in the castle of the Hubelaires. Only one escaped, my father. The day you were born, Cecil the Overlord killed him

in a most horrible and pitiless manner. I am the last of my race. Through my legerdemain I arranged this marriage, and it was not hard to do. Your father, though he can fight, is nothing but a good-natured fool above the neck. The message from Wales was just one phase of my plan, as your father will find only when it is too late. My spirit-men surround the castle. Late tonight, after I am rested, I will place a candle in the window. Then the silken cord will be around my neck and the Golden Key will lie between my breasts. When my spirit-men see the flame of the candle they will swarm into the castle and kill everyone. Then they will overrun this land, slaying all, rich and poor, and once again we shall rule in Cornwall. The Prince of Darkness and your father will learn all this, but too late." She laughed merrily and ended, "That is why I married you, you poor dolt!"

Taking him in her lovely arms she raised him from the bridal bed and rolled him over on the floor. Then she took off her bridal dress and silver shoes and Balder knew that she spoke the truth, because her toes were long and webbed, like those of a toad. Savagely she tore the silk cord from his neck and hung it around her own white throat. Setting a lighted candle on the chest at the foot of the bed, she lay down to rest and was soon asleep, for she had nothing to fear—nothing to fear from such a bridegroom.

Balder, the far from beautiful—save that of him above the neck—lay helpless on the floor. He thought of Cornwall, the land of the Hubelaires, where peace had reigned for so many years; and he knew that he, and he alone, stood between the simple, happy folk and a terrible death. Because there was nothing to say he said nothing. He simply waited, realizing that though he had lost the key, none of the spirit-men would know it until the candle stood in the window.

There was naught for him to do save wait. His bride, the so beautiful Marylyn, with the body and arms of a Venus and the feet of a batrachian, lay drowsing on the bed. At last, she slept, one fair arm slid over the side of the bed and rested, hand on floor. Then Balder knew that fate had delivered her into his power. Very carefully he rolled his body over, and then over once again, a trick he had learned on the meadow-grass. Now his face was but a few inches from the Toad Woman's wrist. He arched his neck, that strong bull-like neck, and opened his mouth. Suddenly he grasped that wrist and fastened on it with jaws that for years, once fastened, had never willingly let go.

The Toad Woman screamed from pain.

Jerking, he pulled her off the bed.

She beat him with her free hand, but he only held her the tighter, shaking her arm as a terrier shakes a rat. Her blood covered his face but he held her with ever more firmly clenched jaws. She dragged him across the floor, trying to reach the candle with her free hand and set it in the window. Once and again she almost touched it, but each time, with a powerful, convulsive movement, he pulled her back to the floor. Each was blood-spattered from her torn wrist. As the conflict continued she grew weaker and with a moan of exhaustion and frustration, she lay quiet and Balder knew that she had lost consciousness. He had been waiting, hoping that this would happen. Unlocking his jaws he jerked upward and secured a new hold on her upper arm. She woke only to scream and faint again. Now, exerting all his strength, he reached her neck and clamped his jaws on it, just below her chin. Almost losing consciousness himself, he thought dimly: "All I have to do now is to hold fast."

Tighter and tighter he held her. Closer and closer his teeth clamped on that lovely white column; at last he knew that he lay fastened to a corpse. He opened his jaws, worked his mouth down the silken cord, now covered with blood, and finally came to the Golden Key. He closed on that with his mouth and, satisfied with the knowledge that his land was safe, he fell asleep.

The next morning, Freda the nurse, tortured by unnamable fears, persuaded Russell the forester to take men-at-arms and break open the door of the bride chamber. There on the floor lay a giant toad, one foreleg torn and broken and the neck horribly mutilated, the body already swollen with putrefaction. Beside the dead toad lay Prince Balder, his face and body red with dried blood. For a moment all stood in amazement at what they saw. Then Russell bent over Balder, touched him gently, waking him.

"Cornwall is safe!" Balder said with a smile and went to sleep.

Freda fastened the Key around his neck with her apronstring, and Russell picked him up and carried him to his room, where they washed and nursed him. In due time he was able to tell the full story of that night battle. Later, Freda retold it to Eric, Overlord of Cornwall, who had returned in haste, suspecting treachery, when he found Wales at peace.

Eric listened patiently till the ending of the tale.

"My son did very well," he said proudly. "Considering that he has neither arms nor legs to fight with, he did very well."

"He has a strong jaw," said Freda the nurse.